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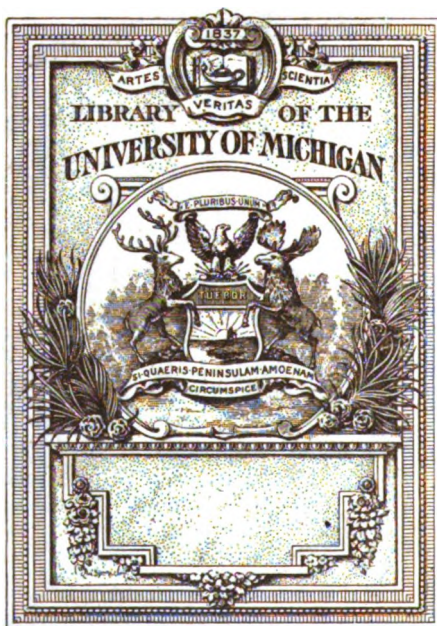
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One clear call

Frances Nimmo Greene



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ONE CLEAR CALL



"You are better," he then said gently [Page 12]

ONE CLEAR CALL

BY

FRANCES NIMMO GREENE

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ILLUSTRATED

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"You are better," he then said gently . . . *Frontispiece*

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course dinner?" FACING PAGE 26

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ONE CLEAR CALL

ONE CLEAR CALL

CHAPTER I

"I *will* not—I will *not!*—" The patient started up from her pillow with a wild protest as her feverish glance rested for a moment in the quiet gaze of the man who stood at the foot of the little hospital bed, regarding her intently.

Almost at the same moment a watcher beside the bed laid a pair of slim yellow hands on the white arms that were extended in protest, and a quiet voice said soothingly:

"No, *of course* you won't."

"Then make him stop saying that I must!— Make him stop *thinking* I must!"

"Why, that's just the doctor," crooned the soft voice of the yellow girl. "He doesn't want you to."

"No," put in the man quietly, "and I shall not let you. Lie down, now. Yetta and I will see that you shan't."

The startled eyes returned to the gaze of the maid; and as they rested there, a change came over the tense figure, and the woman sank slowly back, relaxed, reassured. In a little while, the long lashes drooped, fluttered for a moment against the hot cheeks, and then lay at rest upon them.

A sign from the physician, and the maid followed him silently from the sick-bed.

"Does she keep that up?" he asked.

"Y-yes," said the girl with hesitation.

"Have you found out what it is that she fears?"—he was looking intently at her as he questioned.

"No-o-o," said the girl—and then with more assurance, he thought— "No, it's just her imagining."

While they were speaking, a young nurse entered, evidently without seeing them, and began to spread a blanket over the foot of the bed. Scarcely had she begun to unfold it, however, when the patient started up again.

"I will *not*— I—" she began.

"Sister Anastasia says you *must*." The officious voice of the nurse was followed by a wild scream, and the next moment the maid had her arms about the quivering form of her mistress, and had turned like a panther on the attendant, who was now regarding the doctor with starting eyes.

"You did it on purpose—you—you—!" the indignant maid began.

"Yetta!"—it was the physician's voice of authority that spoke.

The dark girl faced him for a moment with snapping eyes, but she set her lips over whatever had sprung to them, and in a moment turned to the woman who was now clinging to her.

As the frightened nurse left the room on a hastily concocted pretext, the physician surprised a

look of hostility between her and the maid, and he stood watching his patient with an air of distinct annoyance. Speculation did not seem to clear matters for him, however, for the cloud was still in his eyes as he left the room and went to a desk in the hall where the charts were kept for inspection.

The chart of number eleven singled out, his glance passed quickly down it, but was suddenly arrested by a sound which seemed to come, through a transom, from the linen-room near at hand. It was the voice of the young nurse in charge of patient in number eleven, and she was complaining excitedly:

"I can't get a bloomin' thing out her because that white nigger is always on guard. But Sister Anastasia is goin' to ship her to-night; and then I bet I get at what that woman keeps sayin' 'I won't, I won't' all day and all night about! There's a mystery about her, and I'm goin' to find out what it is!"

The physician's eyes remained fixed on the same item, as the voice continued: "I surprised her a minute ago by goin' bang up against her pet crazy notion, and tellin' her that she *had* to, just to see what she'd do. But, good Lord, honey, the thing bust loose and screamed! And if you'll believe me, Doctor Hamilton was right there, and I hadn't seen him! I thought in my soul I'd go through the floor!"

"Miss McClennon!"—the doctor suddenly opened the door of the linen-room—"I want to speak to you."

The buxom young nurse was as white as the fresh linen that hung over her arm as she came out to him, and when she got one good look into his eyes, she unconsciously put both hands on the back of the desk for support.

"I heard what you said in there," said the man, in a voice that was ominous in its very evenness. "Now, your directions are to keep your patient *quiet*. See that you obey." The bowed head was nodding nervously in acquiescence, and the physician continued: "You have nothing to do with the private affairs of your patient, and I am not to hear again that you are prying into them." Big tears were dripping from the girl's half-concealed face now, and the man's voice was slightly modified as he continued: "You will never be a good nurse till you get over being sensational. There is no mystery here, only private matters that don't concern you, so attend strictly to your own business."

"I—I can't attend to my business," protested the weeping girl, "as long as that darky is allowed to sit around and interfere——"

"The darky was evidently right in interfering when she did, judging by your statement in there," and he pointed to the room she had quitted.

"It's—it's—not just that," sobbed the girl; "she's as uppity as she can be, and she butts in all the time. Sister Anastasia says she's goin' to send her away from here."

The physician took up again and examined the

chart of the patient in number eleven, but there was a speculative look in his eyes as he stood with it before him. The nurse shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and back again, watching him apprehensively, and looking longingly toward the way of escape. After a moment of quiet that might have been loaded with any sort of explosive, the doctor said briefly:

"You may go now. Remember what I say."

The tearful girl disappeared into the linen-room again; and the physician replaced the chart on its hook, and went down the long hall to where a blue-robed, white-bonneted sister was practising her vocation on a box of sick-looking plants in the hall window.

"Did the apple geranium live, Sister Anastasia?" he asked over her shoulder.

There was the light of more than the morning in the face that turned to smile at him. "Yes, doctor, it's putting out a new leaf. It was good of you to bring it to us."

"I'm troubled, sister."

"Yes?"

"About that 'Mrs. Godwin' in number eleven." And he told her of the incident in the sick-room.

"I'll speak to Miss McClennon," she said. "It shall not happen again."

"I have spoken to her," replied the doctor. "It will not happen again. But she tells me, sister, that you are going to send the maid away. I'm not sure about the wisdom of that."

The sunny face clouded slightly. "Doctor Hamilton, Miss McClennon says—and the head nurse confirms it—that the girl interferes."

"She'll do better in future, I think."

"Well, it's for you to say, of course. But it's against our rules for her to stay here, you know, and very much against my judgment."

The physician was silent for a space, and then asked: "What do you make of the circumstance now?"

"Nothing more than at first. I told you, didn't I, that the negress paid our charges in advance, and seemed to have a good deal of money in her possession?"

"Yes, she paid the hotel bill, too, I learned. She seemed to have everything in charge—the patient was delirious when they called me in."

"Did you find out anything about Mrs. Godwin's people?"

"No. When I suggested telegraphing to them, the maid assured me that she had no connections whatever. Yet——"

"What, doctor?"

"The girl claims to be new to her employ—I'm wondering how she spoke with so much certainty."

"They were registered from San Francisco, you say?"

"Yes, and the girl says that Mrs. Godwin is native there."

"Doctor, have you noticed that both of them speak with a distinctly Southern accent?"

"That's true—and yet——"

"And yet?"

"The darky scarcely knows her place as we here in the South teach it to them," he concluded.

"Now you see what we have to contend with. The nurses, you know——"

"Yes. Well, if I ask you to keep her here, I'll see that you have no more trouble on that score, sister."

"I hope you will decide to let her go, doctor."

"I'll look in on them again and let you know," he answered; and he retraced his steps and re-entered number eleven.

The patient was sleeping, and beside her sat the dark girl, watching—with the look of being "on guard," Hamilton thought now, and with an unaccountable feeling of displeasure. The maid glanced up for a moment as he entered, then turned her eyes on the sleeping woman again—sullenly, he thought.

Hamilton stood for some moments studying the patient's face and form as she lay before him. The slim, tall figure which the covering sheet draped, but did not conceal, suggested strength, liteness. The bare throat and arms to which an ounce of flesh might not have been added or from which an ounce might not have been taken away without distinct loss in beauty of line, shone too white under the reflection of the whiter wall. The features were regular and delicately defined. The eyes of the woman, which, when open, somehow prevented one

from noting anything about her but themselves, were now in eclipse, and Hamilton saw for the first time the straight, level brows which must have contributed to the look of passion that had always haunted the deep eyes. She was young, but how young, it were hard to guess. "There is no mystery here, only private matters that don't concern you," he had said to the prying nurse. Yet now, *he* stood and wondered. What sinister jest of circumstance had robbed this lovely creature of every human tie, and left her in the hands of——?

From mistress to maid the man's eyes shifted, and the expression in them changed. Here was something to be taken into consideration—mayhap, to be reckoned with. His keen, analyzing gaze scarcely noted the pale-yellow skin, the heavy, almost straight hair, the Caucasian features. He was looking through these outward concealments to the spirit beneath, and he was troubled by what he thought he saw.

Again he summoned the girl away from the bedside; and when they were well apart and in the strong light of the open window, he asked, with his eyes on her face:

"Yetta, do you know that Sister Anastasia wants you to go back to the hotel to-night?"

The something whose presence had troubled him suddenly flamed up.

"I'll not go!" she exclaimed under her breath.

"Not so fast! You'll do what Sister Anastasia and I decide."

The girl looked at him with insolent defiance. "I'll take her with me when I go," she declared.

"No," he replied equably. "The fact that your mistress is not in condition to be responsible, and the further fact that you *say* she has no connections, hardly deliver her bodily into your hands. You'll do exactly what I say, and I am here now to decide *what* to say."

A quick rush of tears to the blazing eyes of the girl took the physician completely off guard.

"Don't send me away from her, *don't!*" she begged.

"What about your interfering with the nurses?" he asked.

"I *never* interfered, not a single time, except when that girl—that—that—Miss McClennon," she corrected sullenly, as she caught his change of expression—"kept asking her questions that excited her."

"Is that the truth?"

"Yes, sir, it *is* the truth."

He was silent for a moment, and then asked: "Is it true that your mistress has absolutely no connections? No friends?"

"None in the world—that is, none that I know anything about," she corrected. "I told you I hired to her just before we left San Francisco."

"Yetta, if anything should happen to her——"

"No, no—not that!" and she caught her lip with her white teeth.

"No, not *that*," he repeated kindly. "She is going to get well."

The hard lines of her face broke pitifully with the breaking of the strain, and the physician asked gently:

"You love her?"

A nod of the head answered in the affirmative.

"And do you think she would want you to stay with her?"

"Doctor, she'll be wild if I go."

"Yetta," said a faint voice.

"Yetta's here!" and the girl was beside the sick one on the moment.

"I'm so thirsty," said the feverish voice.

"Yetta will get you a lemonade," said the doctor, who had come close beside them.

The maid stretched out her hand toward the bell, but the man said with quiet authority:

"No. Go for it."

The slow fire in the eyes of the girl suddenly flamed up again, but the physician dismissed her from his notice with the quiet assurance of one who is used to being obeyed, and she went slowly out of the room.

"You are better," he then said gently to the woman on the pillows.

"Does it make any difference?" she asked.

"Lots of difference. And you are going to get well in a few days." Footsteps were receding down the hall, and the doctor leaned a little over his patient and asked gently:

"Yetta is good? Isn't she?"

"Yetta—good?" The woman started slightly—then laughed.

"She is good to you?" urged the doctor.

"Good—to me! Oh, yes, she is good—to *me*!"

"And do you want to keep her with you?"

"*Yetta!*" she cried, starting up in panic. "Where is she? Where's *Yetta*? Oh, don't let her *leave* me!"

"*Yetta's* right here!" And the girl flung herself on her knees beside the sick woman as if she had dropped out of space. The dark hands met the marble-white ones in a sympathetic clinging.

"*Yetta* is going to stay with you," said the doctor.

Some time afterward, when the patient was quiet again, the doctor took occasion to say in an aside to the maid:

"You are going to stay on condition that you don't interfere, and are properly respectful to the nurses. Do you understand?"

The spring of fire to the girl's eyes told without words that she did understand, but a sullen inclination of the head said that she accepted his terms.

He found Sister Anastasia in the office.

"Change the nurse, sister," he said, "and let the girl stay with her mistress. Tell me if she gives any further trouble."

On his way out, Hamilton met relief and inspiration in the smiling face of a happy, healthy, sane woman friend. She had come with flowers for the charity patients.

"Where's your husband, Maggie?" he asked, after they had shaken hands and chatted a moment.

"In Saint Louis, thank God!"

"Oh, then we can hope to see something of you. Will you be at the Luptons' dinner this evening?"

"Well, no. I never did like to take people by surprise, and the Luptons are not expecting me."

"Oh!"

"By the way, have you heard of their recent bereavement?" She was smiling distinctly.

"Bereavement'? Why, no," he said, trying to find his cue somewhere between the contradiction of her subject and her smile.

"Yes, her stepmother died in Columbus after all her plans for the dinner were made. I got the news from a friend's letter, and called up Mrs. Lupton to tell her how awful it was for her dinner to be interfered with, and incidentally to express my sympathy. And what do you think she said?"

"I can't imagine."

"You are not right bright, are you, Alan? Well, she said it was terrible, of course—about the stepmother—but that she saw no connection between the old lady and the dinner-party, and that she was simply going to go right ahead and give it—the dinner, you understand. Said they were such newcomers here that nobody knew anything about their family, and people simply wouldn't hear of it—the old lady's demise—if I didn't tell it, and she *knew* I wouldn't, for her sake."

"But you are telling it."

"Sure! She forgot to invite me to the dinner,

you see. You are the fourteenth person I've confided the sad news to."

"Well, it won't be any fun without you," he said, holding to her hand a little as she moved away. "Say, tell me something before you go. You wouldn't consider me *imaginative*, now, would you?"

"Why, yes. Oh, don't look insulted about it. You are not *sensational*, you know, but you are so sensitively sympathetic, Alan, you look deeper than most people—that's why you are such a good doctor."

CHAPTER II

THE Luptons knew how to give dinners. The circle of ten that met about their board that evening had been happily selected, and no sooner had they come together than there came and abided with them a spirit of good cheer and coseyness and completeness. Nobody seemed to be missing, and everybody there was *all* there; unless, indeed, the spirit of a certain sombre-looking, thoughtful physician absented itself now and again to somebody, somewhere, who furnished food for troubled thought.

It was during the fish course that the man was called back to the present by a low voice at his elbow.

"Alan," said the speaker, smiling, "I never saw you let yourself go, before. What do you mean? Where are your manners?"

"I—I beg pardon. I was listening to you."

"No, you weren't, because I was not saying anything. You were a thousand miles away. What were you thinking about?"

"You."

"Oh, what a story!"

They both laughed, and then the man's face grew grave as he replied:

"A doctor has no business trying to go among real people."

The laugh had died out of the girl's eyes, too, and she said sympathetically:

"It must be difficult to come out of what you have to face to *this*."

Not often did any one speak to him of himself understandingly. The man looked grateful, as he replied:

"It used to be only 'difficult,' lately it is becoming impossible. I simply can't come sometimes—part of me *will* stay away."

"You seem to get tied up with such terrible, such complicated things lately. It's a pity you can't draw a comfortable family practice from among simple people."

"There are no 'simple people,'" he answered.

"What do you mean?"

"That each one of us carries the universe inside him."

"But every-day people, you know," she insisted—"nothing really interesting ever happens to them, does it?"

"Yes," he said, looking thoughtfully into the heart of a rose that nodded toward him from the centrepiece. "Yes, among the most ordinary, hum-drum circumstances, the little tragedy called 'life' is often played out to its bitterest."

"You are not well to-night, Alan." Her lips were smiling, but her eyes were grave.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and then: "Have you been playing golf to-day?"

"Oh, don't put on your mask again," protested

the girl, in an undertone. "I like you better when you say what you think and feel."

"No," he answered. "It's a mistake to do that, especially at a dinner-party."

"But it's so interesting," urged the girl.

"Ruinous! Suppose everybody were to say what he thinks and feels."

"Everybody hasn't a lot of things bottled up inside him as you have, your theory to the contrary, notwithstanding."

"You won't acknowledge it because that would be in the nature of a confession," he laughed, "but it's true."

"Then a general experience meeting would be lively, to say the least."

"Wouldn't it? Just suppose, for instance, that these people here were to express *themselves*, instead of what they know is expected of them at a party—Listen to that chatter!"

"They would be interesting, too," she said, with a flattering little accent on the last word.

"They would each have a compelling story to tell."

"Our engaging host?" she questioned.

He looked her in the eyes gravely, but he did not reply.

"Mrs. Caswell-Brown?" she ventured, going down the line opposite. "Is it possible that there is a skeleton anywhere within hailing distance of her adipose tissue?"

"You mustn't put the thumbscrews on the doctor," he answered quietly. His eyes followed hers

down the board and rested on the pasty face of a huge man who sat nearly opposite.

"Suppose Mr. Bailey were to express *himself*," she laughed.

Hamilton's face changed. He looked at her rather quickly.

"I know what you are thinking," she challenged.

"What?"

"That if he were to, this would be no place for a lady."

"Exactly." He echoed her laugh, but a something went out of his face which did not again return to it.

The woman on Hamilton's right engaged him for a few minutes, but when he turned again to the other she addressed him in the same subdued tone, and again it set them apart from the others and lent an added interest to what passed between.

"There are two things I *wouldn't* be," she confided to him.

"And they are——?"

"God and the doctor."

"Why?"

"Because I shouldn't fancy being weighted with the sins and sorrows of the world. I wouldn't know all you know for anything." Again Hamilton lent himself to the comfort of her adroit sympathy, and the two continued to talk in very quiet tones, pausing only intermittently to parry the bright thrusts that now seemed to be centring on them in punishment for their sobriety.

Under cover of a laugh at one of the thrusts, the woman opposite said to her companion:

"Phyllis Howard certainly knows how to interest men. She and Doctor Hamilton have chatted *tête-à-tête* through two courses, and he is usually terribly hard to talk to by one's self."

The man addressed considerably waived the question of a difference between entertainers, and replied:

"I have always wondered why Hamilton didn't have sense enough to fall in love with her."

"It's such a solid comfort to dine with the Luptons," the man at Phyllis Howard's left was saying to her, and she turned from Hamilton to hear the rest of the remark. "There are never any playthings scattered about the table that one feels bound to amuse himself with—no place-card witticisms to be exclaimed over, and that sort of thing, you know."

"Yes," agreed Miss Howard, "there is a simplicity about the way the Luptons do things that reminds me of what *grand'mère* tells of times before the war. One is tempted to use the almost obsolete word 'elegant' in describing them."

"'Elegant'?" A black-eyed woman farther down the table caught and echoed the word. "Who dares to be 'elegant' in these 'swell' times?"

"Nobody but Doctor Hamilton himself or old Mr. and Mrs. Garnett," laughed another.

The women, always the keener critics, laughed to each other from around the black-coated figures placed religiously between each two of them, while

they of the black coats smiled slowly as Hamilton looked up from Phyllis Howard at the sound of his own name.

"Oh, Doctor Hamilton, that reminds me—I've got a trade for you!" exclaimed another bright-hued one. Hamilton's sallow face took on a bronzed glow, but the woman continued mercilessly: "Mrs. Bostwick—Mrs. Pig-Iron Bostwick—asked me the other day if you weren't a 'perfect gentleman'!"

A ripple of laughter went round the table in which Hamilton joined a little disdainfully, as he replied:

"I hope you defended me."

"Oh, yes," the other assured him, "I corrected her—told her that you were 'a gentleman'; but she went away mystified—I'm sure she thinks I don't like you."

"Speaking of 'gentlemen,'" interposed the rotund Bailey, "the funniest thing I've heard lately is old Mr. Garnett's trying to describe the styles to his wife. You know," he added to his hostess, by way of explanation to her as a newcomer in the town, "my brother is their doctor, and he gets onto a lot of fun about them. The old lady is blind, you see, and her husband sits beside her, day in and day out, on their front veranda, and details to her minutely all he sees. When the women go by on dress parade——"

"Do you suppose he really tells her *all* he sees?" Miss Howard asked the question for Hamilton's ears only. He met the dare:

"Mr. Garnett is nothing if not a gentleman," he

said. He was regarding her steadily, but the girl laughed at the impertinence unabashed.

Mr. Bailey, having gained the floor, proceeded to make himself amusing on the subject of old Mr. Garnett and the new styles, but Hamilton declined to be drawn into the circle of his listeners. He continued, or attempted to continue, his quiet chat with Phyllis Howard; but he was rewarded by seeing her interest stray ever and anon to the fat raconteur from whose coarse jokes he was seeking to draw her attention. But Phyllis Howard was not alone in her appreciation of Mr. Bailey's wit. That gentleman's first and second essays were applauded generously, and then the raconteur proceeded to draw a picture of what would happen if the blind old lady should suddenly open her eyes.

When, for the third time, the circling chain of laughter found a missing link in Hamilton, the woman on his right exclaimed:

"Laugh, for goodness' sake, Alan! Don't you think that's funny?"

"I think it is pathetic," he replied. He meant his answer as an aside, but found, to his annoyance, that a sudden quiet had thrown it into bold relief, and that the whole table was listening.

"Why?" asked his questioner in surprise.

"Because of all the circumstances." All eyes were turned to the grave face of the speaker. It was one of those moments that occur in the best-regulated festivities, when men and women, designed to think and feel, suddenly rebel against the frivolity

that is expected of them, and turn with relish to the something thoughtful offered.

The black-eyed woman farther down the board leaned forward. "And is it true, doctor," she asked, "that the old lady literally cried her eyes out over her boy?"

"Yes. They were weak to begin with, of course."

"And that is why her husband stays with her always?—Why he tries to see for her all that a woman would see?" asked the host.

"Yes," said Hamilton quietly.

"We are newcomers, you know. Tell us more about it." Mrs. Lupton was looking to Hamilton for her answer.

"It is quickly told," he said. "The Garnetts are of our old-time aristocrats—you know their type—their pride of race, their jealous honor. Only this old couple and their one son are left of the family. The son went to the bad and sinned past their forgiving in his early manhood. For five or six years he hung about town here, going from bad to worse, steadily. Then, about fifteen years ago, he suddenly left for parts unknown. A report soon came that he was dead. The mother still believes it, happily."

"And the son?" she asked.

"He turned up here again about two years ago, but he had gone still further down, and his father and he have continued strangers."

"He owns the Empire saloon and 'all thereto appertaining,'" put in Mr. Bailey with a significant

laugh. Somehow, his laugh jarred on the mood of the company just then.

"What I can't understand," broke in another who had been a silent listener for some time, "is how a man from such good stock could go so literally all to pieces. I can see how he could drink and—all that; but his swindling those Holbrooke children when he had been trusted by their father as executor of his estate—that's what I can't reconcile with the name of 'Garnett.'"

"Drink came first," Hamilton reminded him, "and for a time he used morphine."

"How do you know that?" the first speaker asked. "You are a younger man than Garnett by a dozen years or so."

"Old Mr. Sales told me his private history."

"What became of the children he swindled?" Mr. Lupton inquired.

"Why," replied Hamilton, "they were hardly children. There were three half-grown heirs to the Holbrooke property, two brothers and a sister. They had to leave school and go to work, of course, when their funds were cut off. The rest of their story you can easily supply for yourself, for they were not of those exceptional people who have the genius to conquer fate. They were just like the rest of us average folks."

"Well, isn't Henry Garnett's case just one of those instances of perversion—of degeneracy?" asked another.

"No," said Alan, "Henry Garnett was perfectly

normal. He had the chance to be all that was hoped for him. He fell into evil company, that's all."

"Well, he is done for now," said another.

"I don't know—I have sometimes thought—" Alan was beginning, but a woman interrupted him:

"Mr. Sutherland says that if there ever was any good in him, it was killed long ago."

"Old Colonel Everett says that there never was any good in Henry Garnett," declared another. "He says he regards him as the worst influence that ever came into this town."

"And yet—" Hamilton was beginning again in a quiet tone—but the tone was too quiet. A general discussion had already been precipitated, and this did not abate till somebody propounded the random question:

"What is that old family superstition of the Garnetts'? It seems to me I used to hear——"

"Oh, something about a mysterious warning, wasn't it? It belongs to the Dark Ages, of course," put in another.

"Who knows the story?" some one else inquired.

"I do," said Phyllis Howard, and there was an expectant pause, as she continued: "I don't know exactly where I got it, but the legend is that any one who has in his veins the Garnett blood receives a mysterious warning on the approach of death. It usually comes in the form of an unaccountable call to the one summoned, and it means that he will die within the year."

"An American banshee," interrupted a listener.

"No," said Phyllis, "the banshee cries three times. This summons is heard one time only, but they say that it is unmistakable."

"Less considerate than the banshee," laughed one of the black-coated. "One can respond on being urged, without any loss of personal dignity—It's like running for Congress, you know."

"I am very much afraid the 'Great-What-Is-It' will call Henry when he hasn't got a full hand." Mr. Bailey had to laugh at his own joke, for the humor of it seemed to be lost on the company.

"Has this mysterious summons come to any of the race in modern times?" some one queried.

"If it has, the family have been careful not to mention it," Miss Howard answered.

"I am wondering," said a hitherto silent man, "how a fellow would act who received such a summons."

"He'd eat, drink, and pretend to be merry, just like the rest of us," some one answered. And in the stir attendant on rising from the table, the subject was dropped.

Later in the evening, Hamilton found himself beside Miss Howard again, and again in quiet apartness from the light gayety that had once more come into its own.

"That 'and yet' of yours when we were talking of Henry Garnett—it has stayed with me," she said. "Do you believe in death-bed repentance?"

Hamilton shook his head. "It seems to me," he



“Who talks of ‘immortality’ on the heels of an eight-course dinner?”

replied slowly and as if weighing his words, "that some time, somewhere, we will have to pay the price— That is, if we get anything."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not certain—not certain what I believe, but I have thought of immortality as a condition to be achieved—to be merited—a sort of survival of the fit, you know."

"Who talks of 'immortality' on the heels of an eight-course dinner?" and Mr. Bailey made a place for himself close beside Phyllis.

Hamilton was his own chauffeur that night. As he drove slowly down one of the principal business streets, his eye was caught by the garish electric sign of the Empire saloon, and he at once began to search the changing crowd in front of it for a figure that was now all too familiar to him. Yes, he was there.

Hamilton brought the nose of his machine to the curb in front of the Empire and alighted. Even as he did so, the figure that he had sighted turned and entered the saloon. The next minute, Hamilton was beside the man, at the bar, and had ordered a whiskey and soda.

Hamilton had the impression that Henry Garnett was avoiding him. Indeed, he was sure that the man *had* systematically held aloof from the time of his return to his native town down to that moment. And, somehow, the feeling crept in that Garnett now knew he had been deliberately followed.

It must have been that knowledge and the mild interest excited by it that at length betrayed the older man into turning slightly for a curious survey of the man who stood beside him.

It was the opportunity the other was watching for, and he said, as if a little in doubt: "This is Mr. Garnett, isn't it? I am Doctor Hamilton." The hand that he had half extended was evidently not seen by the man addressed, and Alan quietly rested it on the bar, as if that had been its goal all along.

"Glad to meet you, sir." The reply was studied, the voice cold. Hamilton took in the man in the brief space of their greeting, and experienced a shock at what the intervening years had wrought. The young Greek god of his boyhood, pagan worship had been flung from Olympus, and in his high place sat—this that he saw before him—this spirit of negation. He began to be sorry that he had approached the man at all, when the feeling came over him that there might be something momentous in this seemingly unimportant crossing of their ways. He made one more effort:

"I am Alan Hamilton—I used to know you."

The other man's calculating glance surveyed him, and then the cold voice said slowly:

"No, you never knew *me*." The slight accent on the last word was what determined Alan's next remark.

"Yes, I did, Henry. I am the kid you licked Sam Bailey for slapping."

Was it the afterglow of the old indignation that suddenly lighted the cold eyes?

"He deserved it," Garnett declared, "he was twice as old and twice as big as you!"

The influx of a noisy, roistering crowd of joy-riders at that moment broke up the *tête-à-tête*, but Hamilton said, as he turned to go:

"I am in the Hawley—seventh floor. Drop in and see me some time. I am always there from eleven to twelve, and often in the evenings. I do my studying there, you know."

There was the remembrance of a half-forgotten grace in the slight bow with which the other man acknowledged the courtesy of the invitation, but his cold "thank you" had in it the finality of refusal.

As Hamilton sped along the broad avenue that formed the chief thoroughfare between the city proper and the residence suburbs, on his way to his boarding place that night, he somehow forgot his machine. He was busy with many and varied emotions, and he took the two-mile rise toward the elevated suburb at a reckless speed.

The swift motion, the sting of the night air, the consciousness of freedom, power, got into his blood.

Alan did not think; he only surrendered himself to disjointed scraps of ideas that crowded in upon him. Now a vision of the shattered wreck of Henry Garnett's sin-spent virility would give place to Phyllis Howard's smile of welcome to Sam Bailey; again, a building to immortality would engross him,

and yet again, that foolish, foolish superstition about the Garnetts. Then, the memory of a boyish cheek, stinging under insult, would get itself mixed up with Bailey's damnable joking—and always, through it all, would come a sweet, but feverish, voice protesting: "I will *not*!"

The crest of the long rise came, as it were, unexpectedly, and Alan turned the driving-wheel with a jerk. The car swept into the narrow cross street on which was located the boarding-house that he called home.

It all came in a flash—in one swift moment of revelation! To his left was an oncoming street-car, to his right the sidewalk with a stone wall beyond, while midway across the path of his panting, thundering car limped the bowed figure of an aged woman!

Hamilton took the sidewalk and the stone wall, head on.

CHAPTER III

HAMILTON opened his eyes on the foot-rail of a little hospital bed, and heard the voice of Sister Anastasia saying:

"Doctor Upson hopes that there are no permanent injuries, but Doctor Bailey says that his nervous system will probably never be quite normal again." Then the vision and the voice receded, and he slipped back into immeasurable blackness.

How far he travelled on that lone way he was destined never to compute, and what were the lurking terrors of it his waking language was not afterward adequate to recount. But the light came again—this time faint and glimmering—and with it another voice:

"He had been drinking in the Empire saloon with Henry Garnett, and was driving at a terrific speed."

Blackness again!—A long, long period of outer darkness—and then, gradually, a faint twilight! But it was the twilight of a dawn for Alan, for the light was coming for him, though it came full slow. It was while the twilight lingered that he learned the difference between hands that ministered to him. There was the certain touch of strong, confident hands, red with much scrubbing. These felt natural, and seemed to belong to the beginning of things. Anon, the benediction of transparent, wax-like fin-

gers, with the passionless face of a white-bonneted angel bending over!—then hands that were warm and soft and human in their clinging pity, with a tear-stained face that was—*gone*!

Once, when that elusive, pitying face bent over him, and the touch that he had come to long for was laid upon his forehead, he managed to say:

“I—have something to tell you—something to explain—help me!”

But a soothing, sympathetic voice said: “Not now. Another time—I’ll help you then.”

Later, the same trusted voice had had to assure him again and again that “they” had put absolutely all the pieces of him together, and in orderly fashion—that there was positively not either a missing arm or leg left on the car track for the crushing wheels to pass and repass over.

Then the morning came to Alan. He recognized it by that rosy cloud that wrapped it all about as it entered. It came to him. It sat down beside him. It leaned toward him—and—it had gray eyes!—Was it, after all—a *woman*? Alan blinked hard. Yes, the rosy mist was resolving itself into drapery—and now an aura of bright-brown hair outlined a face above the morning glow. But the deep gray eyes drew his to themselves. Alan looked long and wonderingly into them with the unconscious questioning of a child. Then, as the vision neither dissolved nor volunteered to explain itself, he asked, faintly:

“Are you *real*?”

"Ah-ha," it claimed.

"*Honest?*"

"Yes, 'honest,' too." And it smiled—smiled wonderfully.

"Oh—I didn't mean—" But he was too weak to untangle it. He only looked at her again, long and questioningly, and then asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm sitting here."

"But—where do you belong?"

"I belong across the hall."

"Don't go back there."

"I won't, if you'll be good and not talk. Shut your eyes, now."

He did shut them, but a few minutes later he opened them again. This time he let them travel slowly down that metamorphosed cloud that had wrapped itself about her slender form.

"That's a pretty dress," he said.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes— May I touch it?"

"If it will help you any, certainly."

He tried to put out his left hand, and the next instant his right went up to shield his agonized face.

"God!— They *did* leave it, after all!"

"No, no, they didn't!" and the clinging, pitying hands that had gone with him through the Valley were laid upon the one that he was pressing to his eyes. "It's right here beside you—it's in plaster, but it's going to be as good as new!"

His long fingers were still strained to his eyes as he asked huskily:

"And my legs, did they find them, too?"

"Yes, yes!"

"*Both of them?*"

"Yes, *both*."

"Then why can't I——?"

"They are weighted, but Doctor Upson promises that they will be all right."

"Oh—I, too, have promised!"

"But it's *true*."—He suffered his good hand to be taken from his eyes into a very sympathetic clasp—"Look at me, and believe me. You were terribly hurt, but you are going to be sound and well again—you will only have to wait."

He looked into her eyes, but questioning still.

"And you can feel with your left hand even now. See here—" And she put a soft fold of her morning gown between the swollen fingers that extended out beyond the bandage. "Now rub them together—There! What did I tell you?"

"Why, yes," he said, an expression of great relief coming into his eyes. "Yes—but Upson mustn't leave it in the plaster too long."

"Now shut your eyes, and be quiet."

"Will you stay?"

"Yes."

He did shut his eyes; but after a little he said peremptorily: "Rub it!"

She took the injured hand between her own and massaged it gently for some minutes. Then he said, but with eyes still closed:

"Rub my head, too, it aches."

The strange watcher beside his bed obeyed.

Alan must have dropped asleep under the quieting touch of her fingers, for when he opened his eyes again, it was with that far-away feeling with which one emerges from oblivion. Again he looked at her, long and wonderingly, and then he questioned:

"Who are you, anyway?"

"One that you were very kind to once," she answered quietly.

"When? How?" he asked.

"I was taken ill at the Frankfort—very ill. They called you in. Sister Anastasia says that you attended to everything for me—that you even rode in the ambulance with me because I was afraid without you."

There was a dawning of comprehension, but a still greater wonder, in Hamilton's eyes as she continued: "My nurse says that you wouldn't let them send my maid away from me, and wouldn't let anybody ask me—unnecessary questions. That was all very kind of you—very delicately considerate. Do you remember now?"

"Yes," said Hamilton slowly, "and I remember what a handful that girl was—that darky."

"Yetta is hard to manage— Did she give you much trouble?"

"Oh, no, I shut her up."

"I'm sorry she troubled you— She's so violent when she gets stirred up— You ought not to be talking. Hush, now, and I'll fan you."

"But you," he put in anxiously, "you ought not to be here—working with *me*— You must go back to bed at once!"

"Doctor Upson says it's good for me to have something to absorb me, and I've been out of bed four days."

"And for God's sake—I beg your pardon, for goodness' sake—how long have I been *in* it?"

"Nearly two weeks."

"Now what do you know about that!" After another pause, he asked: "Where's the nurse?"

"I sent her off to get a little exercise—told her I'd watch you. But if you don't shut your eyes and your mouth both right this minute, I'll call her to you, and she's the ugliest on the staff!"

"Miss Birch!— Oh, Lord, I'll be good!"

Surrounded by nurses always striving to win his approval, by white-souled sisters bent on pleasing the saint to whom their services were dedicate, and by a whole host of friends, who, though bodily kept at a distance, were yet constantly reaching across the barrier between to shower him with missives and messages and flowers, Hamilton lived through the weeks of suffering which followed.

He was making the fight of his life for more than life, for he swore by the dull agony of the dragging weights on his shattered limbs that he would yet stand up and give the lie to that sinister prophecy of Sam Bailey's brother. That he fought his fight with never a white flag run up, was due in part to the fact that saving reinforcements were always

near; for soft, clinging, human hands are ever the strongest allies in the battle against despair.

Many times the spirit of the morning came to Hamilton and lingered beside him, for it had come to pass that he was much concerned for the nurse's need of exercise, and begged a substitute nearly every day. He grew rapidly better, so Doctor Upson said; but day after day, he developed a headache that had to be rubbed away, and his left hand gave him a great deal of trouble.

"Long, deft fingers, made to take people to pieces," the substitute said one day, as she gently stroked the injured member.

"No," he corrected, "made to put people together." They smiled at each other, and after a little, he declared:

"Women are instinctive mothers." And he announced his new-found truth with as much elation of discovery as if every other man living had not, at one time or another, said the selfsame thing.

"And men are instinctive babies," she said smiling; "the last one of them loves to be coddled, when once his shield of masculine reserve is broken down." She laid his injured hand down gently. Evidently, she had finished the massage. After that she left that service to the nurse to perform.

But she did not remit him entirely to Miss Birch and his fate; and she took to bringing with her, on her morning visits, something to make him forget to have a headache. It was a little book of selected

poems, and she read aloud, while he listened with his eyes on her face.

Hamilton had long since come to regard poetry as belonging to the boyhood of men, and as being one of those influences which are commonly classified by men as "good for women and children." But as he listened, the heart of him understood; and he came to know that the reason why men put poetry away from them is because life, as they make it, is too small to hold it—because it comes to them freighted with things too vast to be contemplated with equanimity. A *man* must "keep his nerve," and to keep one's nerve one must take refuge in the commonplace; for life, after all, is an every-day affair, and though one carry the universe within him, one must, perforce, press lightly, hardily on his way.

But women are more courageous than men in things that are of the spirit; and deep-eyed and unafraid, the woman beside Alan led him along the way as far as it is given even the intrepid to brave—out to the very marches of that country too vast to be ventured into alone, too sacred to be explored in the company of another spirit.

Once before in life had Alan been so stirred. That was when he had stood, wide-eyed, on the threshold of knowledge, and his mother, with her arms about him, had whispered: "It's a great big wonderful world, but *God* made it—don't be afraid!"

And now this strange woman—this woman who really belonged across life's hall from him—had crossed over to him as no man would have dared to

cross; and though, in a sense, he challenged her right to be there—though he was impatient almost at her very nearness—the stirred spirit within him cried: "Don't go back!"

But as Alan grew better, the woman proceeded to put him farther away from her; and she did it by the simple process of reading him the daily paper.

When things got to this pass, Alan promptly got sicker.

One day the woman who belonged across the hall brought in a change of mental diet for Hamilton. Another convalescent had just lent her a late novel, and she brought it in to read with him. Did he feel like hearing it? Hamilton did; and half an hour was quickly whiled away in getting within the spell of its illusion.

But there came a time when the reader's voice grew consciously conventional and the gray eyes glanced swiftly ahead down the page—when the listener stirred uneasily where he lay. Then the consciously conventional voice grew suddenly tired, and the reader closed the book, while the color that always lurked within call beneath the transparent surface of her clear, white skin, burned up in splotches.

They talked about the flowers that had been sent him, and the woman drifted from that into a description of the gardens of Los Angeles. When she had finished, Alan said, a little abruptly:

"Do you know, you don't talk like a Californian."

"Have you ever lived there?" she asked.

"No."

"Ever known anybody from there before?"

"Well, no—I don't believe I have."

"Then how do you know *how* Californians talk?"

Alan laughed. "I suppose I really meant that you speak like a Southerner."

"Isn't it that you've just got that impression from the fact that I have a darky maid?"

"'Darky,'" he echoed; "there it is! Who out of the South ever called a negro a 'darky'?"

"Are you trying to tell me," she asked very gently, but with her gray eyes steadily on his own, "that I am not telling you the truth?"

"Why, I beg your pardon," exclaimed Hamilton, a deep flush overspreading his face. "I didn't intend any offense. A sick man—oh, a sick man ought to be put out of other people's misery! I'm—not fit——"

She was all sympathy in an instant.

"A sick man," she began, hurriedly laying her hand on his, "a man who broke himself all to pieces to save a lame beggar, ought to have the right to say what he chooses!"

Hamilton started. "Oh, but you see—I—" he was beginning in surprise, but she interrupted him.

"Why *did* you do it?" she exclaimed. "What was that miserable old beggar that you should sacrifice your splendid self for her?"

"Don't!" he protested. "There wasn't any heroic self-sacrifice in it—I was merely trying to retrieve. It was my fault, you see!"

"A man who could do that would naturally be modest about it," she insisted.

"No," he exclaimed, a little fretfully, "I merely took upon my own head the consequences of my own recklessness. I was driving like the dickens, with my mind on other things—and I saw just in time. That's all. Don't get the notion that I did anything more than was up to me to do."

"There!" she exclaimed contritely, "I have worried you, and I have been so proud of being the one who could always quiet you. I'll lose my reputation if you fling about like that."

"But who told you about the old woman?" he insisted, "I somehow got the impression that the street was deserted there."

"One of the porters of the Frankfort was going home that way, and saw it. He brought me something I had left at the hotel the other day, and got to talking about you when he caught sight of you through your door. He told me just how it happened."

A white-bonneted figure entered while she was speaking, and placed a small potted plant on the table beside Hamilton.

"I want you to see how the apple geranium has grown," said Sister Anastasia, "and then I want you to go to sleep."

"Scold me, sister," said Hamilton's companion, rising, "I didn't mean to let him talk so much."

"But there's something I want to tell you—something I want to explain," he urged, trying to detain her.

"Not now—another time," she said soothingly. "I'll leave this. You may want to finish it." And she laid on the bed the novel they had stumbled into together, and went out quietly.

CHAPTER IV

THE Garnetts were living on the newest, and one of the noisiest, streets in town—so rudely does Time jest with us! That which once had been a stately mansion surrounded by excluding acres, had degenerated into a dilapidated pile which now threatened to topple into paved streets that cut dangerously close on side and front. For in the condemnation of rights of way through the Garnett estate, the old eminence, like the old civilization, had been graded down, and much that was sweet in both had been lopped off. Across the street in front, and shading a sprawling livery-stable, mimosa trees of courtly memories stretched out their slender arms in vain toward the home whose founders had left it theirs to grace. The grocer across from the side front had trimmed up a long row of shading magnolias till they gave up the struggle to dignify and seclude this new, garish highway, and in their old age—unappreciated, broken-hearted—turned their faces toward the sky. Where the grocer piled his empty boxes, his garbage, at the back, there myrtle and pomegranate blushed to be found; and where the orchard should have been blooming, white and pink, ran thoroughfares rife with negro traffic.

Above the heads of a new generation that passed and repassed in the streets below, and surrounded by

sounds and sights of another world than his, an old man sat and read—Milton! Sat and read aloud with none to hear but his own approving conscience:

. . . "Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms."

And as he read—so all-obscuring is the self in man—Frederick Garnett and the Almighty Power made common cause together—nay, the one became but the symbol of the other—and another who dared to defy was hurled to ruin.

The sound of a slow, light step in the doorway stayed for a time his avenging arm, and "the thought both of lost happiness and lasting pain" for his offender was put reluctantly away as the old gentleman rose and stood while his wife remained upon her feet. Though blind, she did not like to be helped, so he had not approached her; but she knew that he was standing in the attitude of reverence—so clear is the vision of faith.

"I thought I would come out and see the sunset with you, Frederick." And she smiled as she raised her sightless eyes to his.

"Why, yes, dear, yes," he said, and he turned his own fading eyes to the west. In his mental survey of a "dismal situation waste and wild" and "darkness visible" he had not lifted up his eyes; but as he

raised them now in the direction that a little wraith hand was pointing, he beheld an Italian sunset painted on a Southern sky.

"Gorgeous!" he exclaimed. "It flames to the very zenith. My dear, can you make it?—It's red, burning red, with a new moon hanging in the sky. Out yonder—over the magnolias—there are thunderheads, but they, too, are on fire. And in front there, over that damned stable—excuse me, my dear, over the mimosas—is a long rent in the clouds, showing a background of violet distance beyond!"

"Oh, isn't it *beautiful*!" cried the old woman, with her pale, ecstatic face lifted to the glowing sky.

"It is wonderful," said the old man.

"And there's light, *light*, a radiant, rosy light?"

"But of a setting sun," he said.

"Of a sun that will rise again," she almost whispered, and a something in her upturned face answered the shining heavens.

But ecstatic moments are moments only, and their radiance all too quickly dies. By the time the old couple were seated in their accustomed chairs near the heavy balustrade which effectually screened them from the vulgar gaze, the glory had gone from the heavens, and the prophecy of morning from the sightless face.

Again were they only reminders of a bygone age, left stranded here by the onward sweep of change, but different, one from the other, as widely as human hearts may vary. They sat together and talked of what they saw!

"Those voices, Frederick, whose are they?" the old wife asked.

"Ruffians, over there at that—that stable."

"They are laughing, Frederick, and their laughter is—young!" And she turned her ear eagerly in their direction. "Did you tell them not to break the mimosa?" she asked, after a little.

"I told you that the lot belongs to them, Laura."

"But your mother planted those mimosas! I really can't allow— Oh, well, they are young and happy—let them have some of the flowers if they wish. If I don't watch myself, I'll get selfish.— Frederick," after a pause, "have you heard how Doctor Hamilton's grandboy is?"

"Nearly well again, I understand."

"Oh, I'm so glad! They say he's such a splendid boy."

"Alan Hamilton is a man, my dear."

"Yes, yes, I know, of course. But I just can't credit it! It seems only yesterday that he used to steal my pomegranates."

"It is a great pity that he had to get this—" the old man hesitated for a word, and his face became severer even than was its wont as he concluded—"a pity he had to get this setback. He was making a brilliant record in his surgical practice."

"But he can go right on in that," she exclaimed. "They say there will be no permanent injuries."

"I am not so sure of that." The old man's sceptical interpolation was addressed more to him-

self than to his companion, and the rattle of a passing laundry wagon drowned it completely. It was with a look of relief that he heard her next remark:

"I wonder why Alan doesn't ever come to see us." Then she laughed softly, and added, with an approach to mischief in her sweet white face: "Frederick, I'm going to send that boy some pomegranates as soon as they are ripe—just for a joke, you know. Won't it be rich?"

There was a silence between them, measured by the passing of a negro charcoal peddler whose sonorous, singing cry filled the twilight. Then the woman raised her head at the sound of other steps, and questioned eagerly:

"Who is it, Frederick?— Who are these?"

"Just two commonplace young men going home from work."

"Why don't they come in and chat with us, Frederick, and tell us the news?"

"What does their generation care for ours?"

"Why, why," she hesitated, "life runs downstream, Frederick, it's our place to be interested in them. Suppose you speak to them."

He did not answer, but when the blind woman leaned forward as a group of gayly dressed girls approached, he volunteered:

"Three of those flashy high-school girls. I don't see why their mothers allow them to parade the streets like that—bareheaded, too!"

"But with ribbons, Frederick, bright ribbons on their hair?"

"Flaring, vulgar colors—tied round their heads like gypsy rags," the old man growled.

"With here and there a truant curl?—How pretty! Young, smiling faces!" And a little faded pink glowed sympathetically in her pale cheek. "Tell me some more about them."

"Their dresses are low, of course. The word describes them in more ways than one."

"They must be dear—young girls' throats are so pretty!—There, they are stopping to chat! Are they looking this way, Frederick?"

"If they did, they would not see *us*!"

"I wish they'd take a notion—just for fun, you know—to come in and sit with us a few minutes. I'd so like to talk to them; and I'd like to feel how one of those new-style dresses is made—so slender and quaint—with the bright sash, tied gypsy fashion."

"They are passing by," he said in low-voiced warning.

The pink glow died slowly out of the old woman's waxen cheek. "Everybody 'passes by,'" she said.

And now another step was approaching—the heavy step of a man. The sightless eyes widened.

"*Frederick!*" she gasped. "Who—who is *that*?"

The old man looked down the avenue, and the pathetic, sagging lines of his face turned to steel. A man indeed was coming along their way—if *that* could be called a "man."

"Who is *that*?" the blind one gasped again.

"A stranger—to you and me," he answered her.

"But *Frederick*," she whispered, as one might whisper in the presence of the dead, "that step—it's—it's——"

"The step of the stranger," he answered her again.

The bent form had started forward, and the sightless eyes were now strained to see what this was that was coming their way.

"What does he look like, Frederick—see him for me!"

"Like—the broken promise of a man."

There was a gasp as of a sob—and then, eagerly again:

"But he is tall—isn't he?—Tall, Frederick?"

"Yes, he's tall."

"And his shoulders?—they are big, *broad* shoulders?"

"Yes, his shoulders are big and broad."

"And his hair, Frederick, does it curl thickly over his splendid forehead?—Oh, Frederick, you usually see so well for me!"

"His hair is a little thin over his forehead—but it waves— Hush! He's getting near!"

"But that step—*that step*!—It—it—*didn't use to hesitate*!"

"It does not *hesitate* now," he answered, in a tone that would have been concluding, if it had been less low.

"Oh, but I *know*," she whispered again. "There! didn't you hear it falter then?"

"It did not falter," and his low voice grew almost hard.

"Call him in!" she whispered excitedly, as the step that the two of them heard so differently became imminent. "*Call him in!*"

"He is a stranger to you and me," and he turned his back to the balustrade, for the passer-by was now very near.

In the same instant the blind woman started to her feet and leaned almost over the balustrade. She was trembling from head to foot. Her withered old arms were stretched out in shaking appeal, and the faded, sightless eyes had started from their sunken sockets.

"Frederick!" she gasped, "the—dead—do—come back!"

The passer-by did not look up, but he uncovered his bent head as he passed.

He passed.

"*Call him in!*" the blind one pleaded.

His faltering step—did it falter?—was receding now.

"*Call him in*—before it is—*too late*," she moaned.

And now the step from beyond the grave was gone—lost in the rattling traffic of a younger world than theirs.

"You might have called him in!" she sobbed in abandon now.

"He is a stranger to you and me." The man's husky voice replied.

"But he wouldn't have minded—I am an old woman—a blind old woman——!"

"There is nothing—nothing you could have said to him—that he would have cared to hear."

“But I could have put my hands on his big shoulders—could have run my fingers through his beautiful waving hair!—He had a mother!—He’d have understood!”

CHAPTER V

THE woman from across the hall had not come in that day, and Alan was watching for her with growing restlessness after his afternoon nap, when the door opened, and the next most welcome face appeared in it. It was the happiest, healthiest, sweetest face in the town, and Alan greeted it with a smile that might have been reflected from a sunny boyhood.

"I take it that Tom is still in Saint Louis," he laughed, after their greetings were over, and she had duly inquired after his arm and his legs and his insides. "Sit down, Maggie, it's good to look at you."

"No," she declared, "as usual, Tom broke his neck getting back. I had just shipped the boys off to the plantation with Mammy, and was getting ready to have a good old 'girl' spend-the-night party, when here came Tom! But the dear goose was so radiant over having shortened my period of despair at his absence, that I didn't have the heart to tell him how I wanted to kill him."

Alan's face wore a composite expression.

"Don't talk so loud," he said, "other people might not understand your joking."

"'Joking'! Oh, but it's like a man not to be able to credit that! You men can't believe that

women ever get tired of you and long for just each other's company."

Alan laughed.

"There it is again!" she exclaimed. "But my dear boy, you take my advice: If you want to keep Phyllis in love with you after you are married to her, relieve her of your presence once in a while. Give her a chance to miss you!"

"I see," said Alan, frowning slightly, "you are trying on me your theory about making things happen by simply keeping on talking about them."

"No, it's just that I've got sense enough to see you are in love with Phyllis, and you haven't. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I got you nearly to the point of proposing to her weeks ago, and now—bless goodness—when I talk about your marrying her, you honor me with one of those stern, highbrow looks you usually reserve for people you don't like."

"Phyllis wouldn't have me, if I were to ask her," he replied guardedly.

"Oh, of course it's up to you to say that. But gentlemanly conventions being duly satisfied, now, tell me what has happened between you two."

"Nothing."

"That's not so. Something has come over the spirit of your dreams that you won't tell me about." She waited a moment for the expected reply, but none being forthcoming, she continued:

"And I want to put you on notice that there's

another man making hay in your pasture while you waste your hours of sunshine."

"Who?" he asked with prompt interest.

"A Mr. Bailey."

"Oh, *that* Bailey!"

"What do you mean, Alan, is there more than one?"

"Yes—but very different men—no kin to each other. This one is Doctor Bailey's brother."

"How did you know which one I meant?"

Alan laughed. "They told us at school, Maggie, that 'a' and 'that' are not descriptive adjectives; but when a man is constantly spoken of by those who know him but slightly as '*a* Mr. Bailey,' and by those who are on to him as '*that* Mr. Bailey,' who *needs* any better description of him?"

"Well, I know why he is '*a* Mr. Bailey'—I've met him—but what is it that justifies your damning '*that*'? Is he the one that scooped the iron lands the Steel Trust was dickering for?"

"He's *that* one."

"Well, wasn't that just a stroke of 'high finance'?"

Alan's eyes flashed. "While he was the agent of the steel concern in its proposed purchase of the lands and had learned of them through its experts, he sneaked in and bought for himself the most valuable plot for little or nothing, and then made the company come across with an outrageous price—You may call it what you please."

"I don't please, I'm a lady.—He lost his job, didn't he?"

"Of course, but he didn't want a job then. He had made his million."

"Then his brother will be able to give up general practice, and devote himself entirely to surgery before you are."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"Well, he's the man that's gathering your hay."

"I shall never believe that Phyllis is encouraging him."

"Isn't everybody else in this town running after him?"

"No, they are not. A handful of people who consider themselves 'everybody' are doing so, but people like the Howards——"

"Phyllis Howard has been to the theatre with him twice and been driving with him several times in the space of the last three weeks. Besides that, he has showered her with flowers and candy till she says herself that she feels as if she were being bought on the instalment plan."

"Phyllis certainly can't know——" he began in disgust.

"No, and somebody ought to tell her."

"Why don't you?" he queried.

"She'd take it better from you, Alan. Women have a great deal of respect for a man's evaluation of a man."

She watched the ripening of determination in his face, and changed the subject, her object accomplished.

"Isn't this man's brother the surgeon who is always trying to underrate your work?"

"Some of my friends say that he does."

"He's jealous of you, Alan. I'm awfully sorry you had to——"

"Yes, so am I," he replied, in her pause. "Don't say that I told you, but Doctor Bailey is already predicting that I'll never have the nerve for surgical work again."

"I heard he was—the mean, hateful, contemptible thing! Tom says he's winning a reputation for himself by pretending that every case which comes to him is a desperate one, so he can seem to work wonders.—But he's the one who insisted at first that Joe Holbrooke didn't have tuberculosis. He wouldn't make an examination for a long time, you'll remember—or rather, he didn't."

"Yes, I wish the Holbrookes had called me in in consultation. I haven't seen anything of them for years, but I think Roger might have remembered our old friendship, and have given me the chance to do something for Joe.—How is Joe?"

"Why, he died! Didn't you know it?"

"No. Did he?" he asked, with a suddenly clouded face.

"Yes—last week."

"Poor Joe!—But it's just as well."

"I went to see him at the hospital, Alan."

"I wish I could have done something for him!"

"Why, Joe told me that you had offered to give him the money to go West, and he was so hopeful."

"It was too late," said Hamilton slowly. "I didn't know his condition in time. If it had been six months ago, he would have got well."

"Joe didn't want Roger to know he had consented to take the money from you." She looked out of the window a moment, and then exclaimed:

"Isn't it awful what Henry Garnett has to answer for!"

"I'm only afraid he'll never get the chance to answer," said Hamilton, almost as if speaking to himself.

"What do you mean?" his companion asked, bringing her glance back to his face with a still more pointed question in her eyes.

"Why, I believe—that unless a man is fit to survive, he simply goes out with the other beasts."

"You don't mean that, of course! You certainly know that Henry Garnett is going to be roasted over a slow fire for the way he inveigles Tom into playing poker with him, now don't you?"

"No, Maggie," he replied. "You see——"

"No, I don't see, either, and I don't want to be made to see!"

"Why? Wouldn't you like to believe—?" he began.

"*That* I wouldn't, I'd like to turn the spit! Besides, the mother of five little boys *needs* hell-fire in her scheme of things!"

"All right," he laughed, "if you need the devil for an ally, I'll not spoil your little plot."

"Speaking of the Garnetts," she said, "the old

man grows harder and more pitiable every day: You see, he knows all about Henry's doings. I'm so much sorrier for him than for the mother."

"Yes, it's a pity his eyes, too, are not shut to the truth," said Hamilton sadly.

"Oh, it's simply awful," she replied. "You know," she continued, "we had a little mite-meeting up at their house the other night, and one of the exciting dissipations of the evening was for each to give his definition of 'heaven.' They were funny, and pathetic, too—the definitions, I mean. Old Aunt Celie, who poked her black head in the door just in time to be challenged, said that heaven was 'de place whar dere ain't no rent to pay.' Little Sadie Ransom got out between giggles that it was 'something happening every minute,' while Tom, poor Tom, said 'quiet,' and old Mr. Garnett—'forgetting'!"

"Fortunately, the years are not many before he will be able to forget," said Hamilton thoughtfully. "Trouble like that shortens its own time of remembrance."

"And yet you are not willing for me and my ally to give Henry Garnett his due!"

"I could wish a better fate for him."

"Alan," she said, looking at him curiously, "you are a funny fellow! Here is that Mr. Bailey, who isn't half as bad a man as Henry Garnett, and yet you are not willing for him to live on your earth, while——"

"Sam Bailey never was a *man*!" he broke in with the petulance of a sick man.

"Oh well, now, don't get worked up. My ally and I will look after your Mr. Bailey for you.—Let's talk of something more pleasant— What's that you've been reading?"

Alan showed her the book which the woman who belonged across the hall had left with him, and in which he had since been engrossed.

"Oh, you naughty boy!" she exclaimed. "Lend it to me when you get through with it. Phyllis says it's awfully spicy."

"I'll not do anything of the kind! Where did Phyllis get hold of it, I'd like to know?"

"Now, don't go and lay *that* on Mr. Bailey, too!—Phyllis borrowed the book from Carrie Weston."

"Phyllis has somehow—lately—" Alan came to a full stop.

"Poor Bailey!" laughed Maggie.

"She's such a fine girl in so many ways—but——"

"Still looking for your ideal, dear?" And she smoothed the long locks back from his forehead, very gently.

"Still hoping," he answered, looking up into her kindly face.

"Give it up, Alan. Fortunately for you, she doesn't exist."

"How 'fortunately'?"

"A man couldn't live with his ideal woman a week—she'd bore him to death; he'd have to escape to the refuge of a more colorful personality."

"Speaking of personalities," he said, after a pause, "I have a friend here whom I want you to meet."

And he told her about the woman from across the hall, and how good she had been to him. Maggie suddenly gathered the long locks into a tight bunch.

"Oh, *you!*" she exclaimed, "so that's why Phyllis is 'such a fine girl—*but—!*' Tell me, is this wonderful creature pretty?"

"Hush, Maggie, she's a *married woman!*"

"I asked you if she's *pretty*," and she gave the bunched locks a twist.

"Qui-i-t!—She's *beautiful!*"

"Of course! But I wish I could get a woman's verdict—a real *well* woman's verdict."

"Why?"

"Because a sick man will fall in love with and rave over anything that will pet him."

"*Hush, Maggie!*"

"But why must I hush? Don't you know that truth crushed to earth just naturally *will* up again?"

"Somebody might hear you—you know how easy it is to set people talking."

"'Easy'? Alan, it's nearly impossible. It's been the ambition of my life to be whispered about mysteriously, but, instead, the world only shouts at me and slaps me on the back. I have dreamed of being a 'dangerous' woman, but there are only five people on earth that consider me dangerous, and they all wear short trousers."

"You want to fire another Troy?" he laughed.

"And, instead, I sit at home and spin."

"Your Ulysses trusts you implicitly," he smiled.

"That ought to be some comfort."

"But it isn't. It's the very thing that nettles me most! When I was a girl, a gypsy promised me that I was going to be loved by a dark, jealous man, who would try to kill me. Tom's eyes were black, and I jumped at him—but they might as well have been pale blue!—I could go off with a man and be gone a week, and Tom wouldn't think a thing of it!"

Alan shook with laughter.

"Oh, you needn't laugh," she exclaimed. "If you could only plumb the tragedy of it!—If you could only know what it means to aspire to be one of those women that men break their hearts and each other's heads over, and then to have to simmer down into merely one of the spankers of the world!"

She had risen to go, and he was holding both her hands in his one good one.

"Don't!" he pleaded.

"But I must. It's time to make out the rolls for supper. Let me tell you something: Tom and I are coming for you as soon as you are able to sit up, and we are going to keep you till you are strong enough to tackle that boarding-house again with some sort of hardihood."

"You are the greatest girl in the world, Maggie, but what could you do with me together with all you have on your hands?"

"Oh, you can be the handsome devil that invades Tom's home. You look the part, all right."

"But I can't come, dear, I'm afraid I'll——"

"Tell me that you are afraid of *me*!" she chal-

lenged. "Tell me you are scared of me, Alan, and I'll love you forever!"

"Not as long as I behave!" And the two of them laughed as they had not laughed since their public-school days together.

"Oh, I can't resist it," he said, on being urged again.

"I'll be back in a few days," she promised, "and then I'll let you introduce me to the beautiful, mysterious lady of my envy."

Alan's face became quickly grave. "I don't like for you to talk that way," he said.

Maggie laid her cool fingers on her old play-fellow's forehead and looked into his eyes.

"A word to the wise," she said.

But Maggie's warning to Alan was given more by way of clearing her own conscience of a manifest duty than in any sort of hope that her old chum would profit by her advice. She had a good working knowledge of men, and in the light of that knowledge she knew perfectly well that Alan would go straight to a coveted objective, especially if the objective happened to be a woman.

And in the light of that same working knowledge of men, Maggie proceeded to perfect her scheme for circumventing Alan on the blind side of him—as has been, perforce, ever the way with women. On her way home, she dropped in at her husband's office and said to him:

"Tom, I want you to let me bring Alan Hamilton home with us as soon as he is able to leave the

hospital." She told him all about the mysterious 'Mrs. Somebody' who evidently 'spent nearly all her time with Alan,' and added: "I've got to get him away from her as soon as possible, so I don't want him to have the inconveniences of his boarding-house as an excuse to stay at the hospital with her, any longer than necessary."

"Why, it's all right with me, Mag," cheerfully replied her rather fierce-eyed but mild-mannered husband; "but won't he be awfully on your hands?"

"No," she replied, patting him on his bald spot; "you see, Phyllis Howard is right next door, and I know she will be willing to help me keep him amused."

"Suits me," responded her lord and master. "Invite him as soon as you please."

"I knew you'd let me, dear, and I'll ask him the very next time I go— And, say, Tom, you'll help me keep the boys off him, won't you?"

Shortly after Maggie had left Alan, the 'beautiful, mysterious lady of her envy' dropped in to inquire how the day had gone with him. But though he had longed for her all the day through, her appearance now gave him a distinct shock. Instead of the soft, graceful invalid style of gown that she had worn till now, and that had always seemed such a veritable part of her beautiful presence, she was clad in a conventional tailored suit, and the metamorphosis somehow made Alan positively indignant.

"What are you doing with that on?" he demanded, with the licensed rudeness of an invalid.

"Why, I've been out to-day attending to some business. I'm well now, you know, and I've got to go."

Alan's world suddenly turned gray.

"'Go'?" he echoed, starting visibly. "Go? Back to California?"

"No, not yet," she said slowly, and she turned and looked out of the window.

"I'm—glad," he answered, and then he looked at her delicate profile long and searchingly. He was thinking of Maggie's word to the wise. After a little, he called her name:

"Mrs. Godwin——"

She did not reply, or turn toward him, and he called her once again.

This time she started distinctly; then she smiled at him, and came over and took her wonted seat beside him.

"Don't go back there," he pleaded. "There isn't anything to take you back—is there?"

She slipped her fingers from out the broken hand that had suddenly closed over them, and said:

"No. There's only myself to plan for."

"And you are going to *stay*?" He was running his good hand nervously through his long locks now.

"Yes," she answered, "I've leased that pretty old place that belongs to Mr. J. C. Fletcher."

"Good!—But what's become of the Fletchers?"

"They are going abroad for a year, and they have let me have their place with all their furniture and things. It makes it very convenient for me."

In spite of the fact that an expression of intense relief had come over Hamilton's face, there was the suggestion of worry in his voice still, as he exclaimed:

"But that place is so big and lonely! Those immense magnolias all about it set it apart of themselves, and the extent of the grounds will positively cut you off from your neighbors."

"But I want to be cut off," she answered. "I—why, I live to myself. I don't expect to enter into the life of the town any."

"But you can't live a complete recluse, it will be bad for your nerves. You must let me give some of my friends the pleasure of knowing you—in a quiet way, you know. Now, the Luptons live right across the street from the Fletcher place. I'll——"

"Oh, don't ask anybody to come to see me!" she exclaimed quickly. Then she added, with some embarrassment: "It is nice of you to want to provide for my entertainment, but—why, I'm better by myself. I've had trouble, you see."

"I didn't know," said Hamilton, with his eyes on her deep-blue tailored suit. "I beg your pardon."

"That's all right," she said, with earnest concern, "and you understand, don't you?"

"Yes," said Alan, "but you don't mean to exclude me with the rest?—You'll let me come sometimes, won't you?"

The woman slowly shook her head. She was looking down in her lap, and her long, dark lashes veiled her eyes from his eager gaze.

"But you *must*," he pleaded.

"I can't let you," she said, looking up at him now with a little frightened protest in her eyes.

"Then I'm coming, anyhow!"

But she did not leave him as soon as he had feared. It developed that the Fletchers were delayed a week longer, and asked to retain the house for that added time. Doctor Upson said that it was good for Mrs. Godwin to remain under Sister Anastasia's care a little longer, so the lady of Maggie's envy spent a good part of the next seven days reading to a fellow patient who every now and then, when the halls were quiet, begged for the little book of poems again.

She did not again refer to the objectionable novel, but Alan returned it to her one day to be given back to its owner. What he had intended to say on returning it was simply to advise her not to finish it; but what he really said was: "I don't want you to read this." And she answered: "I won't, if you don't want me to."

Then, one day, Hamilton asked her to tell him something about herself; but she didn't seem to hear the request, so absorbed was she in arranging some new flowers that had been sent him, and he had not the hardihood to ask again.

The inevitable day of separation came at length, and the woman came across the hall to Alan for the last time. She had on her hat and gloves for departing.

Just outside the door, Hamilton noted to his dis-

pleasure, waited the yellow negress. Her burning black eyes, that he caught fixed intently on him, were quickly turned away, but she did not move from her place.

It was Alan's injured hand that Mrs. Godwin took in saying good-by.

"It has been good to know you," she said, for all the world as if this were the end of that knowing. "I shan't forget you."

"But I'm coming to see you," he protested.

"No, you must not—unless I send for you."

"But you will send? And when?" he asked eagerly.

"When I need Doctor Hamilton," and she laid down the injured hand that she had been holding, and left him.

Hamilton turned abruptly to the window.

CHAPTER VI

"DOROTHY PERKINS" had come to town by the time Alan was able to walk out on Maggie's terrace and welcome the newcomer in all her radiant rosi-ness. Indeed, Dorothy had been there some days—long enough for half the hedges, pergolas, porches, and terraces in town to glow under the touch of her kindling fingers—before the young doctor was able to stand on his barely restored feet, and gaze down the long avenue at the signs of her glowing presence.

There are people—dull-eyed, dull-spirited people, of the sort who are always mistaking effect for cause—who speak of Dorothy Perkins as if she herself were just a rose, albeit, the rosiest and most prodigal of roses. But the initiated know that for one brief, blessed season in every Southern year, the spirit of light, of fire, of radiant loveliness passes along our ways, and that wherever her footsteps linger, wherever the touch of her light fingers is felt—there burns a rose.

Alan, half-pagan, wholly Southern, understood; and in spite of the fact that Phyllis Howard and a new book were only a half-dozen paces away, waiting his pleasure, he found himself wondering if a Californian could feel, as he felt, this wonderful presence that had sprinkled all his visible world with

flowers. For what does it profit a man to gain hand and foot, if the spirit within him have not sympathy?

Was she *real*, after all? Or had that sweet spiritual nearness of her been but conceived between the sick man's fancy and the eternal man's eternal need? Why had she not come to him in all these weeks that had dragged between their parting and this hour? Why, when he had written to ask permission to call "very soon," had she had the cruelty to write him that Doctor Upson still thought it better for her to be perfectly quiet—that she was sure he would understand? Of course, there had been a few lines of conventional sympathy, conventionally expressed—he, himself, was so far from strong, etc., etc.—but were they worth counting at all?

But Phyllis was waiting, and Phyllis had been very kind to him, for had she not come over to amuse him often and again? And had she not always responded cheerfully when Maggie called to her more times still to come and help hold the bear? Yes, Phyllis had been good to him. Indeed, it is a question whether the bear *could* have been held without her help. But what with daily *tête-à-têtes* at reading, at chatting over tea or chocolate on Maggie's terrace, nay, at poker itself, Bruin had been kept reasonably quiet. And Bruin was reasonably grateful, too. He felt drawn to Phyllis for all that she had done and was doing for him. And Phyllis was waiting.

Alan withdrew his gaze reluctantly from the glowing vista stretching away toward the home of the

Fletchers, and came and took his seat at the waiting girl's side.

Phyllis laid the novel on the stone balustrade and produced another book—a book of poems. How would Alan like to vary their mutual dissipation a little?—they had read novels so much.

Alan looked at the little book, and shook his head. Another woman had taught him, and out of that selfsame book, that the number “two” is the greatest divisor of the inspiration of a poem—but not just *any* two. He said aloud that he would like the novel better.

But the novel proved uninteresting, and after a little they were talking again. Phyllis had promised, or rather, threatened, to read his palm for him; and she now proceeded to execute her threat, a little to the subject's chagrin. With Hamilton, dignity was ingrained, and it was hard for him to lend himself to play; but, nevertheless, he soon found himself being entertained.

Out in the yard, Maggie was punishing Tom for refusing to go to church, by making him weed her flowers. She had a theory that if she could only have two or three Sundays in each week, she could really get some “work” out of her husband; for Maggie hardly considered “working” that which Tom did in his dingy down-town office from half past eight till five, six days out of the seven—albeit, that same discounted activity kept a roof over their heads, abundant food on their table, and clothes on hers and the backs of her sturdy sons.

Tom had refused flatly to go to church, so now he was following Maggie over the place, digging when and where she said dig, and stopping promptly when she ordered him to desist. For Maggie's flowers, like everything else about the place, were *Maggie's*. It was "Maggie's house," "Maggie's yard," "Maggie's garden," "Maggie's dogs and cats and chickens." The five sons of the family were "Maggie's sons"—Yea, even the very author of their little beings and provider of all these comforts—he, too, was "Maggie's"! So, Maggie's gardener dug where she said dig, and stopped promptly when she ordered him to desist.

It was during one of his enforced stops that he peered round the crêpe-myrtle that divided them from the terrace, and exclaimed:

"Mag, they are *holding hands!*"

Maggie took a quick look. "Oh, pshaw," she exclaimed, disappointed, "Phyllis is reading his palm. She's had that trump-card of hers up her sleeve a long time."

"How trump-card?" her husband inquired.

"It gives her an unlimited opportunity to talk to him about—himself."

"But Hamilton isn't egoistical—" he began, when Maggie interrupted with:

"Honey, Alan is a *man*!—Get those violets spaded up before the preacher comes by."

On the terrace, Hamilton was listening with growing interest to Phyllis's soulful and intimate analysis of him. Phyllis knew what Hamilton did not—

that men are rather easily reduced to a formula—and her somewhat overlong experience in society had taught her how to do it with ease. Alan smiled as she told him what he knew she knew from her long-standing friendship with him, and tingled slightly as she disclosed to him for the first time things that everybody in town knew about him except himself. Phyllis did some shrewd guessing also. Alan was—oh, well—what you would call “temperamental.” He would make “a furiously jealous lover.”

But a surprise was in store for him. As Hamilton’s cynically smiling eyes took in the details of her carefully disarranged hair, while, with lowered head she studied his palm, the girl started distinctly—and it was a splendidly pulled-off, convincing start.

“A-ha, old sport, I’ve caught you!” and she gave him an upward glance that was nicely balanced between surprise, incredulity, and unwilling conviction.

“What?” asked Hamilton, a little coldly, perhaps.

“Do you *really* want to know?” unwillingly.

“Of course I do.”

“Well, you won’t blame me?—It’s all foolishness—I don’t suppose there is anything in palmistry at all—but——”

“Of course there’s nothing in it; but what do you *think* you see?” he asked in a perfectly even voice.

“Why, your *hand* says”—hesitating—“that—

that you have a terrible weakness—undeveloped as yet——”

“Of intellect?”

“No——” she waited an impressive moment, and then said, “of *character*, Alan.”

“It’s good to know that it’s undeveloped as yet,” he laughed, “but go on, be more explicit.”

“Why, your *hand* says that—let me see—give me both so I can compare them—yes, it’s in your left, too.—You—I mean your *hand* says that you would secretly indulge—well—that—that you could be tempted to drink—that you ought to watch yourself——”

Suddenly, the memory of one crucial sentence, caught somewhere between life and death, started out of the shadows into which it had slunk— “He had been drinking in the Empire saloon with Henry Garnett, and was driving at a terrific speed.”

Alan withdrew his hands. “Thank you very much,” he said, “you make it surprisingly interesting.”

“But you don’t blame *me*, Alan?” she hastened to put in.

“Why, certainly not.”

“Of course, there isn’t anything in it,” she rather insisted.

“Of course not—not much, at least—but it’s good sport, all right.”

“Yes, it’s only that.”

“Speaking of—‘character,’ have you ever read Mr. Bailey’s hand?” he asked.

"No," she said, and then with a quick, appraising glance: "You two seem—opposed to each other."

"Well," he replied thoughtfully, "I can't quite see what Bailey has against me—*yet*; but I am going to make trouble for him, Phyllis."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because of his attentions to you," said Alan frankly.

Phyllis accomplished the feat of removing her glance so adroitly that her companion was left to choose whether she had dropped her eyes or merely glanced away, as the developing situation might justify.

Maggie had impressed Hamilton with the idea that he had great influence over Phyllis by reason of her faith in his judgment "and all," and also with his very obvious duty to save her from—well, from what a splendid, noble, pure-minded girl like Phyllis just *couldn't* understand. Hamilton went straight to his duty. He told the girl all that the conventions would allow him to tell her about the man whose attentions she had been accepting so freely. When he had finished, she turned upon him a swift, tearful glance of gratitude, then looked away.

"I felt that I could say this to you, Phyllis—that you would take it from me," he said, studying her half-averted face with earnest speculation.

"I—I wouldn't like for another to say it," she answered, hesitating, "but of course—with you—it's different."

"And you can trust my judgment in this. I know what I'm talking about," he urged.

"Of course," said Phyllis, slowly turning the pages of the book in her lap, "I'm always willing to be guided by you, Alan."

"Then I shall take the courage to fight that 'undeveloped weakness' that I may deserve your confidence," he replied.

A real or an imagined touch of lightness in his tone caused the girl some uneasiness. Only that morning Maggie had said to her: "He's getting crazy about you, Phyllis, but you know you have to help the hardiest of them." Alan was proving hard to help.

"*Don't* let that foolishness bother you, Alan. I wouldn't give you a moment's displeasure for anything—there's nothing in palmistry, nothing."

"Nothing but—the palmist," he said.

Phyllis looked up at him quickly. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"What did *you* mean?" There was little of sentiment in the grave eyes that were looking straight into her own.

"Why, nothing, I tell you, Alan."

Hamilton reached over deliberately, took possession of her hand, and began to examine her palm closely. "Turn about is fair play," he said. After a careful study of the captured hand, he continued gravely:

"I see by this flaw in your heart-line that you've been listening to—yes—let me see—and *crediting*—gossip about one of your friends."

Maggie came up the terrace steps at this juncture, and Hamilton turned to her, as if in relief.

"What on earth have you been doing with that trowel?" he demanded.

"Laying brick, of course," she replied with a laugh.

Alan took possession of her left hand and swung it gently, as he said with mock earnestness:

"Maggie, dear, this won't do! If you want to make men break their hearts and each other's heads over you, you *must not* spend your Sunday mornings killing cutworms and laying brick. You'll never be a 'dangerous' woman at that rate!"

Maggie regarded the broad flatness of her trowel thoughtfully. "I don't know," she said. And they both laughed.

Phyllis, feeling neglected, promptly proceeded to assert herself by calling to the husband gardener, who was now approaching up the steps:

"Tom, Alan Hamilton is holding your wife's hand!"

"Hamilton's got good taste—always did have," said the husband, with the bland complacency of a man who has just been paid a compliment.

Alan laughed so heartily that he brought on a fit of coughing, and his concerned host said kindly:

"Bad cough, that, Hamilton, for a man in your run-down state— I'll tell you what—just before you go to sleep, to-night, you get Mag to rub your chest good with some of her 'possum oil."

Hamilton made the effort of his life to keep from smiling, but Maggie went off into near hysterics.

"The handsome devil invades Tom's home, and is greased with 'possum oil!" she gasped, between convulsive ripples of laughter.

"Tom," said Phyllis, "this is no place for a perfectly good husband, especially when a neglected, unnamed baby is crying for help inside. Come on!" And Tom followed her with alacrity, eager to show off his youngest born to anybody who would stop long enough to consider that yearling gentleman apart from "the bunch."

"Give it up, Penelope," laughed Alan, as the two disappeared.

"Isn't he killing?" and Maggie wiped the tears out of the corners of her eyes.

They sat down side by side on the stone balustrade, and Maggie asked with interest:

"Did you tell her about Mr. Bailey?"

"I certainly did."

"I know she took it all right—she has so much confidence in you." And Maggie darted a scouting, surreptitious glance at him.

"Why, yes, she was awfully nice about it. Said she was always willing to be guided by me."

Maggie's face beamed. "And what did you say *then*, Alan?"

"Why," he replied, trying to recollect, "the subject being closed, we talked of something else."

The light died out of Maggie's sweet face. After a little she said, with the breath of a sigh:

"Men are simple-minded creatures, at best. But now that you've cut her off from that Mr. Bailey,

you must pay her some attention, Alan. You must see that she doesn't miss anything by having to turn him down."

Just then a long, singing cry pierced the quiet of the still, bright morning.

Maggie started suddenly to her feet, with a face pale with apprehension, and Alan rose quickly and stepped to the banisters. Down the long street a boy was coming on the feet of the wind, waving his arms and shouting as he came. A moment of suspense, and then the cry, "Good news! Good news!" reached them. The life swept back into the face of Alan's companion. A few minutes more of keen expectancy, and then one of Maggie's sons, panting and breathless, flung himself into his mother's arms with his news:

"The Holbrookes have asked me to dinner!"

Maggie was furious. "If you *ever* scare me like that again, I'll—I'll tell your father—I *certainly will*! No, you *shan't* go to dinner with the Holbrookes. Your father says that not one of you can put his foot there for a month."

"But, mamma—I didn't hint this time, a bit——"

"The question is: *Have I got to speak to your father?*" Maggie was holding him by the front of his jacket, and looking at him with sudden death in her eye.

"No-o-'m," and the slowly released young one fell back, conquered. The next minute he disappeared into the house.

"I hate to have to keep them away from Roger

Holbrooke's children," said Maggie, "but that woman Roger married is so hopelessly ordinary—and her children are so like her—I just *have* to, as much as I can."

"It's a pity they are so near you," said Alan.

"Yes, that makes it impossible to keep them separated. It's only when I hold the sword of Damocles over them, as I did just then, that I have any success at all."

"Their father's name seems to be one to conjure with," said Alan, with interest. "Do you know, that has been the miracle of miracles to me. Tom used to be as mild as a May morning. I never would have suspected him of anything like this iron nerve."

A curious, wistful little smile crossed Maggie's face as she leaned forward and said, with the air of one who is about to disclose a state secret:

"If I tell you something, will you promise never—never to let it out?"

Alan promised.

"I'm just living in dread of the day when Tom and the boys find out that he really isn't going to eat them alive."

"But, isn't he?"

"Never in the world."

"It's a fixed-up threat, then?"

"Yes, I tell him and them that he is *very* stern with them. But he wouldn't help me a bit if I didn't keep him touted up to it. I tell him how glad I am that he is not like other fathers, always saying, 'Go to your mother'—dear, easy-going soul!"

"Dear, *easy* soul, you mean," he laughed.

"Don't laugh, Alan, you don't know what it is to have to be father and mother, too, to five boys!"

"Well, your little ruse seems to work all right."

"Yes. But it never would have worked if Tom hadn't looked so fierce. Poor fellow! He has the temperament of—of Longfellow's poetry, but he looks like Bombastes Furioso, so I manage very well."

Bombastes appeared at this juncture with a baby Bombastes on his shoulder—the chip so comically like the old block, that Maggie and Alan both laughed.

"Can't you two hear the dinner bell?" he demanded.

It took some generalship to dispose the diners at the table in orderly fashion, for four of them were still in that stage of man's development described in Maury's Manual of Geography as "the barbarous state," but Maggie accomplished the manœuvre surprisingly well.

When they were all seated with heads bowed over the soup, which had already been placed to avoid the rush, Maggie called on the youngest at table to ask a blessing.

He accomplished the feat something after this fashion: "Lord-make-us-fankful-amen-mamma-is-this-gumbo?"

Every boy at the table instantly began to fish around in his soup.

"Yes. *Hush!*" said the mother, in a tone that added on its own responsibility, "before I kill you!"

"*Chicken* gumbo, mamma?" the youngest insisted, dodging the look. Maggie tried again to frown him down.

"Yep," cried another; "here's a pully-bone; look here, Tommy. I bet this is Bantam Moll." It was six-year-old Billy who precipitated the trouble.

The four-year-old sentimentalist turned big filling eyes to his mother. "*Who* is it, mamma?" he pleaded; "*is* it Moll?"

"Hush, Tommy, this instant!" Maggie ordered, under her breath.

But love knows no law. "But who is it, mamma?" Tommy urged. "Is it Moll or Peachy or Flossy or——?"

"—Bet," whispered Maggie, desperately, "she scratched up your garden, you remember!"

"Mamma—" began Billy.

"Mamma—" broke in Archie.

Alan looked up with his dark eyes full of laughter. "Maggie," he said, "why don't you 'speak to their father'?" Maggie glanced from him to her husband in panic, and then back to Alan again. Phyllis was silently convulsed. A vague, speculating look had come into the eyes of the father of the family, when Maggie adroitly saved the day with:

"Tom doesn't like to be severe with them when you are not feeling well, Alan."

"But I'm feeling fine to-day—" Alan began with

a flash of boyish devilment, when he was interrupted by the tearful sentimentalist with:

"Mamma, did Bet *want* to die?"

"*Tom!*" said Maggie, in appeal to her husband.

"*Boys!*" said the fierce-eyed father promptly. And they subsided, for the time being.

The grown-ups present toyed aimlessly with their soup spoons as having lost heart over Bet's possible unpreparedness to go, but they of the barbarous state reverted to savagery and ate up their stewed friend with relish. When the soup was removed and a big dish of fried chicken was brought on, one of them broke out again.

"Uncle Alan"—Maggie had sought to ally her sons to her old playfellow by that name—"Uncle Alan, I'm awfully sorry you're going away soon." Hamilton opened his mouth to express his very genuine gratification, when the imp continued: "We have such good things to eat when you are here."

Maggie's face turned crimson, but Bombastes Furioso laid down his fork and roared.

For some time the conversation lingered over trivialities, and was broken in upon, ever and anon, by the barbarians. After a while, however, the elders began to indulge in gossip, and the interest concentrated.

"Alan," said Phyllis, as her contribution to the new interest, "we've got a genuine mystery here at last."

"Here? In this house?" he questioned.

"No, here in town."

Hamilton intercepted a significant look which

Maggie intended for Phyllis, and immediately grew interested.

"Tell me about it," he said to Phyllis.

"Why," she proceeded, not looking at Maggie, "there has appeared in our midst a mysterious woman who positively refuses to be reduced to details. She has leased the Fletchers' house and furnishings and hired their servants and motor-car. But she has not, one time, put her foot out where people can really come in contact with her, and has refused to see all callers. They say that an airy yellow darky she brought here with her does all her shopping."

"And don't people grant Mrs. Godwin the right to do as she likes?" asked Hamilton gravely.

"Do people grant any of us that right?" she parried.

"*That* they don't—" Tom was beginning, when Maggie interrupted him:

"It is so very certain that people do not grant us the right to do as we like, that it seems to me the woman must understand what she risks in defying the conventions."

Hamilton raised his head a little quickly.

"I know Mrs. Godwin," he said. "She was a patient of mine at Saint Joseph's at the time of my accident; and, afterward, during my convalescence, was very kind to me. She impressed me as being one of the best-poised women I ever met, and one of the most womanly."

"And *beautiful*," added Maggie, with a warning look at Phyllis.

"The most beautiful I ever saw," replied Hamilton, with a touch of nettle in his voice.

"I've seen her," said Phyllis dryly.

"And what do *you* think?" he asked quickly.

"That—you must have been sicker than I realized, Alan."

"Well, Maggie *met* her," and Hamilton turned his frankly displeased countenance to his hostess.

"Just for a minute or two, you remember, Alan," said the lady appealed to. "You know you couldn't make her stay and talk to me."

"But you *saw* her," he insisted.

"Yes—but——"

"But didn't you think her beautiful?" he urged.

"Burne-Jonesey," Maggie threw out to Phyllis, and then she answered Hamilton with: "Why, Alan, her face was more fascinating than beautiful—fascinating and *appealing*—with the suggestion of covered fire. I imagine a face like that could take on many changes."

Maggie was never to know that that conversation at her table was one of the determining influences which took Alan back to his boarding place the next day—out of reach of her solicitous watchfulness. Neither was she to know that on the very evening of his return to his old abiding-place, he, without so much as "by your leave," drove himself in his repaired car out to the sometime home of the Fletchers', but only to learn that the lady of his quest was "not at home."

CHAPTER VII

AND Maggie didn't know that he went again to the sometime home of the Fletchers' the very next afternoon, though her working knowledge of men might have taught her that he was likely to do just that.

There is nothing like taking the enemy by surprise. Alan, who was his own chauffeur to-day, perhaps by accident, saw his chance as he was about to pass the Fletcher residence, and seized it. The lady of Maggie's envy was on the side veranda near the porte-cochère. Her back was to the drive, and she was busy with a potted fern. Hamilton wheeled his car into the grounds, and very shortly thereafter was standing, hat in hand, before her.

It was really an unpardonable rudeness—the swift changes over her mobile face convicted him on the instant, and sent him, in spirit, penitent, to his knees.

She had turned at the sound of his voice and retreated a step against the big fern that she had been tending. Astonishment that leaned to incredulity suddenly widened her heavily fringed eyes. Next, displeasure leaped to replace her unbelieving; and then, to Hamilton's dismay, a vivid blush burned up

from her slender throat and overspread the delicate face that, nevertheless, remained lifted proudly.

Hamilton was at his row's end.

Time was when a fellow could command the favor of a lady friend with a big stick—time, when he could make off with her by the hair of her head to any one of seven hills; but King Arthur and his Table Round had interfered, and now—where was Hamilton? Where but in the grip of an impotent contrition, disarmed, and completely at the mercy of a creature whom he could have carried off on one arm?

But the face of his dread conqueror was changing again—changing this time to the perfectly conventional,—and somehow this phase of her mood struck even the stump of his broken weapon from his hand. The impetuous protest that had sprung to his lips died upon them.

The lady was holding out her hand, and saying in a perfectly even, perfectly cool voice:

"How do you do, Doctor Hamilton?"

He took her proffered hand for the instant in which it was yielded.

"I was—passing by," he said lamely.

"Yes," she agreed.

"And I saw you through the trees."

Her silence gave consent to this. He had a vague feeling that Phyllis Howard would have helped him here.

"I came yesterday afternoon, but you were not at home."

"No, I was sorry," she said, as was to be expected.

Arrived at this point, Hamilton had to make a fresh start.

"I've been very anxious to see you—to—" he paused a moment, and then it came of itself—slipped out almost inadvertently—"I have something to tell you."

"Oh!"

"And—" he was pulling himself together now and asking himself in effect "Who's afraid?"—"And I thought that maybe——"

"Yes?"

"That, maybe—you'd ask me to sit down."

A quick color glowed under her opalescent skin again. "I beg your pardon," she said, "but when one is taken *by surprise*, one isn't altogether responsible—is one?"

"That would depend entirely on how long the invitation was deferred."

The flame flickered in her cheek.

"Come inside," she said, "to the fire. It's a little cool."

Hamilton thought so, too, decidedly. He followed her in through a long window, and a few minutes later was seated within, before a low fire in the Fletchers' very pretty living-room. The soft gray-green that prevailed in the restful interior, with the deep, dark green of the giant magnolias, glimpsed through every diamond pane of the many casements, recalled the chilly, fitful shadowiness of the earlier springtime, and rendered very welcome

the fire that glowed in the basket grate of the big chimney.

The woman was poking up the fire—a little more vigorously than was necessary, Hamilton thought. When she put the poker aside, she turned directly to him.

“Aren’t you going to apologize?” she asked.

“Why—I don’t know,” he replied, as if weighing his answer. “Of course I’ve been outrageously insistent. I even grant that I ought to be thumped, you know, for coming here. But I couldn’t say that I am sorry, could I? *Could I?*”

“No,” she said, adroitly misinterpreting, and sitting back in her chair a little straighter—a little farther away from him. “No, that would not be complimentary to your hostess.” Hamilton looked straight into her eyes, but she shifted her glance to the glowing coals in the grate.

“But you might say,” she continued, “you *ought* to say that a man who forces himself on a woman who—who is really a stranger to him——”

“But you are *not* a stranger to me.”

“Yes, I am.”

“I beg your pardon, but how do you make that?”

“Why, that little half-way acquaintance that developed between us at the hospital——” she left off as if expecting him to finish for himself.

Hamilton leaned toward her with a sudden dare in his eyes. She must have seen, for she glanced quickly away.

"You mean that little 'half-way' acquaintance of ours when you used to rub away my headaches?" He paused a moment to watch the rising tide of crimson in her half-averted face. "And hold my hand for hours at a time?"—The tide was higher now— "When you used to exorcise my desperate moods by patting me on the cheek and telling me to 'never mind, dear,' I would be a whole, strong man again very, very soon?" He paused a moment, for the crimson tide was at flood, and then he went straight forward——

"Do you mean that little half-way acquaintance in which, one day when I said I couldn't bear the dragging of those weights another hour, you sat by me and curled my hair?" Hamilton paused, for the rose-petal face was no longer averted, and there was something of a remembered tenderness and mischief in the eyes that were suddenly raised to his.

"I didn't do anything of the kind," she protested. "*It wouldn't curl!*"

They laughed together—the laughter in which feeling so often takes refuge. Hamilton's face was tense, eager, when, a moment later, he protested: "No man is either whole or strong without sympathy. Don't take yours from me, for I have no other."

After a silence between them which spoke for itself, the woman said, and with a return to something of her first embarrassment:

"I—I think I rather owe it to myself to tell you how that little 'half-way' acquaintance— Why, the

truth is, I thought you were a *boy*—years younger than you are—a heroic, half-killed boy!”

“I’m only thirty-one,” in an injured tone.

“Yes, but——”

“I was your physician.”

“I imagined they had been letting you ‘learn’ on me because there was nobody there to take my part.”

“And was it that feeling that made you such a Tartar to deal with in your delirium?”

“*Was* I a Tartar?”

“*Were* you? You said, ‘I’ll not do it’ at almost every breath—I never saw such a spirit of fight in my life!” Her face sobered quickly, Hamilton noted.

“What else did I say?” she asked.

“Nothing else that any of us heard,” he replied. “That little black-and-tan spitfire that you had with you wouldn’t give you a chance to be interesting.”

“You can’t scare me with what you heard,” she said, with a slight, forced smile, “but those nurses—Why, people say such foolish, such absurdly irrelevant things when they are sick. I’m glad I did have Yetta with me to spit fire at the nurses.”

“Yetta did it all right! I’d hate to come up against the ill will of that creature.”

“So should I,” she said.

“And I don’t seem the same to you?” he asked, dropping a subject that seemed distasteful to her.

She laughed lightly again, and glanced at him appraisingly.

"You are so *big*—now that you are——"

"Clothed and in my right mind?"

"Yes—and then, you know," as if continuing her own exoneration, "you were so ill."

"Do women like men better sick than well?"

"I—why, it's this way," with another soft laugh, "a man's masculine self-sufficiency goes out of him when he's ill, and he surrenders shamelessly to the petting and coddling that he is really crazy about. You see, having already fallen from his high estate, he has nothing more to lose."

"The eternal *mother* finds him then?"

"And mothers him when she finds him—without thought of a to-morrow."

"But if he needs her sympathy in that to-morrow," he urged, "if he needs it more than when his mere body was hurt?"

She looked up at him quickly, and there was in the depths of her eyes the expression that he had seen there only on those days in which he had protested that he could bear the tugging of the weights no longer.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Why, *everything*."

"Is your old world—difficult for you, now that you are back in it?"

"Oh—no."

"You said you had something to tell me."

Alan hesitated. His natural reserve was protesting. "It is nothing," he said.

The deep, thoughtful eyes of the woman sought

counsel of the glowing embers, then returned to his own. "When you were delirious," she said, "you kept trying to tell me something—trying to explain something that you could never quite express. It seemed to worry you."

"It is too small a thing for a well man to consider." Which, being interpreted, meant that he had retreated farther within himself.

They sat silent for a space. The shades of the late afternoon gathered softly round them, but two or three falling embers entered a protest.

At length, Alan asked a question without any prelude:

"What is your Christian name?"

"Faith"—with a start, and then, more deliberately—"but don't you call me by it."

He laughed softly, and asked another question:

"When are you going to tell me your history?"

"Am I going to?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Then perhaps you know when."

"Well, why can't I come to see you?"

She looked out at the gathering twilight. Alan thought for a moment that she was not going to reply, and he wondered if she were vexed with him. Her voice was low and even, however, when at length she said:

"Another time I'll answer."

"And I may come back for the answer?"

"No." But so gentle was the reply that it was all but lost in the sound of the opening door. The

octoroon girl, Yetta, came in and stood waiting for permission to speak.

"What is it?" her mistress inquired.

"A telephone message from the 'Mrs. Lupton' across the street asks if Doctor Hamilton will come over there," the maid replied.

"Tell her 'yes,'" said Hamilton, as the girl looked to him for answer. Yetta retired and closed the door softly behind her. Somehow, Hamilton felt relieved when she was gone.

He and his hostess rose.

"How do you suppose Mrs. Lupton knew you were here?" she asked.

"She knows my car better than I do—she's—that kind." A shade passed over his companion's face, and he added: "I'll tell her that another patient caused my delay—a *stubborn* case." But though his car awaited him just outside the casement, and Mrs. Lupton, across the street, Hamilton lingered. He had taken Faith's dismissing hand, and now stood holding it.

"Let me come, *sometimes*," he begged.

"I can't."

"You were good to me over at Saint Joseph's—you gave me your friendship, your sympathy then."

"You needed it so sadly then—but now——"

"Now, I need it more. *Let me come!*"

"I—I'm obliged to deny myself to callers. You don't understand."

She tried to withdraw the hand that she had yielded to him, but his strong fingers closed over it.

"I need you, Faith!"

She raised her eyes to his quickly.

"When you really need my sympathy or counsel or comfort, you may come, but not till then." Before she could stop him, he had kissed the hand that he had retained forcibly between his own. "And not until you can remember the conventions," she added, withdrawing her offended hand with a quick, burning blush.

A slight noise at one of the long windows caused both to look up and listen.

"I leased the Fletchers' collie along with their house," the woman said, "and he thinks that veranda belongs to him."

They looked at each other again.

"I may come *sometimes*—just to see you," he pleaded.

"No—I think not."

"But just——"

"Mrs. Lupton is waiting for you." They were standing near the long window through which they had earlier entered.

"I'm coming," he insisted.

"Not till I say so. Good night."

"But you will say so, won't you?"

"Mrs. Lupton will not think your other patient very sick if she sees her standing at the window for hours with you—good night."

"Good night," he said, at last, "but *I'm coming!*"

Hamilton sat with his fingers on Mr. Lupton's pulse, and asked himself:

"Now, what is it that *she* is so foolishly secretive about?—Women of that type are so sensitive. It's a mistake to make a mystery of anything these days!"

CHAPTER VIII

ALONE in his cheerless office in the Hawley building one night, Hamilton faced the discouraging situation in which he found himself on coming out of his long sickness.

He had lost three months from his practice; patients that he valued had transferred their allegiance to other physicians; surgical operations which he had hoped to perform—one in particular by which he had expected to gain more than local reputation—had gone to other men. His great case that was to be—his great hope—had been bungled by the man who had undertaken it. That the patient had died, was incidental—the crux of the situation was that the opportunity to perform the reputedly impossible, to solve an hitherto unsolved problem, had slipped out of his fingers. He had worked out for himself a theory; this had been his chance to demonstrate it; he might never have another. And all this for the sake of doing what it was his, as a man, to do!

But the end was not yet. Hamilton knew better than any brother practitioner who attended him that the time would be longer still before he could dare to trust his shattered nerves with the instruments

of life and death. And he might not—the awful fear jumped on him, now that it had caught him alone—he might never again be able to take up the work which had become bigger to him than life itself! Bailey might be right, after all!

Then there rose that despicable little suggestion of Phyllis Howard's. But he always thought of Phyllis in brief sentences, and she and her suggestion were soon put aside to make room for a sweeter, a more haunting presence.

This sweeter, more haunting one, had refused to let him call on her. Now, why? And why, when she thanked him for his several consignments of flowers, did she write such unpardonably brief notes? And why, in the name of common sense, all these trappings and circumstance of mystery with which she had set the whole town talking? Why——?

A knock on the door startled Hamilton out of his speculations, "Come in," he called after a brief moment of wonder at the unexpected interruption.

The door opened slowly, and Henry Garnett—emaciated, ghostly—stood on the threshold.

Hamilton was quick to veil a shock of sheer astonishment and to rise with his hand extended.

"Come in, Henry, come in," he exclaimed cordially. "You—are—not sick?" he asked. But the question was entirely perfunctory; a something more than sickness had set its seal upon the cadaverous face and figure that, with the door pulled-to behind it, stood framed in a dark facing, which seemed

only to foreshadow a narrower boxing still. And, somehow, the low vest and white tie seemed to fit too perfectly into the ghastly suggestion.

"You are not sick?" said Hamilton.

"I? Oh, no," answered the deep, quiet voice that Hamilton remembered so well. "I saw the light in here for the first time since your accident, and came to see how it was with you."

"Why, I'm all right again," exclaimed Hamilton, wheeling the most comfortable chair in place for his visitor, "all right, except for a fit of sheer lonesomeness and a blue devil or two. I'm so glad you dropped in."

When Garnett took the proffered chair—thereby bringing his face within the immediate radiance of an electrolier—Hamilton's first fears for him were but confirmed. So nearly did he look the dead man, that the movement of his long, waxen fingers on the table between gave Hamilton almost a start; and the deep, inscrutable look in his cold, dark eyes proved scarcely pleasant to meet.

No, the visitor did not care to smoke. The host pushed the proffered comforts from between them and said frankly and sincerely:

"I appreciate this visit, Henry."

"I went to see you at the hospital the morning after your hurt, but, of course, they didn't let me in to you. You were reported dying."

"I was knocked up inside, you know," said his host, "but they never told me you had called."

"No, I guess not," said the other; "nearly every-

body in town did go, you know. They'd have hardly remembered all."

Hamilton's surprise and gratification at this man's interest in him led him to speak of his sickness somewhat at length and with flattering frankness. When he had finished Garnett raised his inscrutable gaze to his and asked:

"And just *how* did the accident happen?"

Hamilton tried not to show that the question, coming as it did, set him thinking. He related the circumstances as they had happened, without any elaboration, any comment.

"I saw you that night—at the Empire—" said his visitor, "you remember? Wasn't it immediately after that that the accident happened?"

Hamilton suddenly straightened. He pushed the electrolier to one side so that he might face his visitor squarely.

"Garnett," he said, "ten minutes after I left you at the Empire I knocked myself into smithereens—but *I was not drunk!*"

"I knew it," was the other man's only comment.

"Is that what they are saying?" In spite of him, the lines about his mouth became drawn.

"Yes," said Henry Garnett, looking at the desk beyond. "I knew that you were all right when I saw you, and I thought the accident came immediately after. I wanted to be able to say so."

"Is that why you came here to-night?"

"Yes."

There were a few moments of silence between

them, and then Hamilton said, with an attempt at lightness:

"I'd always rather know, wouldn't you?"

"Why, certainly," said the other, with a promptness which suggested that he had long since come to that conclusion. "Of course it would be beside the question for you to make any explanations, Hamilton," he continued. "It is really not worth noticing at all, except for——"

"Except for my practice?" asked Hamilton.

"Yes," answered the other, "but people will forget it soon."

"Garnett," said the younger man, after another pause, "did you ever hear that my grandfather drank?"

"Yes," replied the man addressed, "and your father, too.—Oh, they both drank like gentlemen—never let themselves go, you know—but each injured his practice, in a degree."

"And they were not *surgeons*," said Hamilton.

"No," said the other.

"And people will say—are saying—that I have inherited their weakness."

"—You seem to have made some enemies, Hamilton."

"I have been a little too successful, I suppose."

"Yes, very probably—but I wouldn't let it trouble me. I thought it well for you to know—that's all."

"Oh, certainly—I'm glad you did."

They changed the subject, and after a little Henry Garnett rose to go. As Alan noted the bearing of

his gaunt figure, the poise of his head, the something in his glance which sin had not availed to quench, he could but wonder how much more would have to be subtracted from this man before he ceased to look the gentleman.

"Well, if you won't sit longer," said the host after polite protestation, "I'm going to keep you for something else. I'm going to look you over, Garnett, and straighten you out. You are in bad shape, man."

"I'm a little run down—but I never let myself pay any attention to things like that."

"Who's your doctor?" demanded Hamilton.

"Haven't any. I'll get you to drop around and make out the certificate," replied the other with a gray smile.

"Now, see here," said Hamilton, "you've done me a turn to-night which shows that you feel kindly toward me. I want you to pocket whatever prejudices you may have against 'things like this' and come in here with me"— And he laid his hand on the door that led to his consulting room. "Do it to gratify me, Garnett."

That it was upon a whimsical impulse that the visitor yielded to his most unusual appeal, Hamilton had no reason to doubt, for the man's whole attitude betokened distaste as he followed into the inner office.

A half-hour later, when the two emerged into the waiting-room again after the long, painstaking examination, it was Hamilton who looked the graver.

"Well, what do you make of it?" the patient demanded. "You are uncommunicative, doctor."

"You've got to take care of yourself, Garnett. And I'm going to see that you do."

They were standing facing each other over the shaded electrolier the green light of which illumined their faces but darkly and gave to their guarded glances a certain weird intensity.

"I asked you for the truth, Alan." The deep, even voice resounded solemnly through the quiet room.

Alan looked into the man's inscrutable eyes—Immortality *here?* God, for the solution! His imagination reeled before the looming vastness of this possible soul tragedy—but what he said was:

"You are up against it, Henry."

"Down and out?" inquired the man whose all hung in that balance.

"Yes," said the other, "your heart is going back on you, and—there are complications."

"How long do you give me?" and he smiled.

"Months, maybe—a year at best."

The doomed man was idly marking the table-cover with a paper-knife. As his sentence was pronounced, however, the point of the knife stopped. There was a pause, but barely a pause. He looked up and said:

"The Garnett summons." Then he smiled again—a strange, mirthless smile, and added: "The rôle of banshee is a little difficult for you, Alan. A more bloodless man ought to have been cast for it."

Hamilton fairly caught his breath. He looked at the stationary point of the paper-knife, and then up again at the man who held it.

"You—you must not let this—go to your head, you know," he said.

"No, no," answered the other steadily; and he turned toward the door.

"I want you to let me do what I can to make you comfortable," Hamilton hastened to put in.

"Why, yes, of course—much obliged," the other replied evenly, from the now open door.

"And if I can help you in any other way, I am at your service."

"Thank you—thank you very much, Hamilton. Good night."

"Good night."

The door closed upon him, and Hamilton was left staring at its dark, polished panels.

The Empire saloon building "and all thereto appertaining" belonged to Henry Garnett, and he had reserved as his own abiding-place an airy suite of rooms on the fifth and top floor.

It was toward this abiding-place that the owner took his way on the close of his interview with Doctor Hamilton.

The loungers in front of the Empire noted no change in Garnett as he passed through their midst toward the building entrance, but the elevator boy took a sharp second look at him as he entered the lift, and that young gentleman confided to the hall-

boy as he stayed his machine a moment at the top floor and looked after Garnett's disappearing figure:

"Dead men oughter be planted. It ain't fair for 'em to be left walkin' aroun'."

Garnett unlocked his door, entered, and closed it behind him. He did not turn on the light. A soft twilight, refracted from the myriads of city lights around, revealed the familiar objects clearly enough. He found a comfortable chair, drew it to the large plate-glass window that stretched nearly across the end of his sitting-room, sat down, and stared out over the quieting city.

Below him, the grimy sheet-iron tops of lesser buildings staggered together—now rising a little above the common level, now sinking below—and all covering, hiding, shutting out from each other men who were marching to the grave. Yonder and yonder and yonder, sky-scrapers rose dizzily above the dead level, but those men in them—working overtime—they, too, were marching to the grave—a little faster, perhaps, than these dead-level others.

It was midnight. Already many of the lights were winking out. Rattling carts grew fewer and fewer. Autos, however, seemed suddenly to multiply, and the speed-limit was tucked away with the virtuous commonplace, for men with money to leave must hurry, hurry—to leave it. Pedestrians became scattering, and the scattering few quickened their paces, for all the world as if that which yawned ahead beckoned irresistibly. Henry Garnett looked out. A luminous haze trembled over the city.

One o'clock! And now chimneys and smoke-stacks were numbered with the sleeping; but here and there thin strata of forgotten smoke lay lightly on the heavier air. The haze grew less luminous as Henry Garnett watched.

Two o'clock, and all was well with that city! At least, so would have reported yonder policeman who walked while Henry Garnett kept vigil. The hovering mists lifted—lifted till they caught a borrowed radiance no more—lifted till they hung gray-black between the earth and heaven. Night, they say, is the time to sleep, and it is forbidden for waking eyes to look upon its mysteries. Is it true that he who watches, in violation, must meet the stark faces of fearsome things in the isolation of the silence?

Three o'clock! And not even a pale star or two watched with Henry Garnett in his hour of deepest dark!

Four! And the sleeping city stirred uneasily. The lone watcher caught the throb of its first awakening.

Five! The gray morning! Belching stacks and chimneys again. Hurrying feet—hurrying to the grave! And over and about and through it all a dull, sifting, misty rain.

Six, seven! A world of dying men to meet and walk with and talk with as if death were indeed a superstition, and the mention of it something less than manly.

Eight! And somebody—something—knocking at Henry Garnett's door!

"Come in," said the man who had watched all night.

The door opened, and Alan Hamilton came in with a ready-made brightness on his face.

"Good morning to you; you are up early," he exclaimed in a creditable tone of cheeriness. But even as he spoke his eye fell upon the low-cut vest and the white tie that he had noted the night before, and the truth of the doomed man's vigil was made manifest.

"Morning, Hamilton; come in." If that slow, stiff rising was painful to him, he did not let his inscrutable face reveal the fact. "I dropped asleep in my chair," he said; "I often do that."

"I had to be out early," said Hamilton, lying on his part, too, "and thought I'd drop in and leave this with you. It's a prescription—will you follow it?"

"Yes. Thank you, Hamilton," and then, a little grimly, "I'd like for you to keep the machinery well oiled till it breaks."

"I can add much to your comfort, Henry."

"That's good," said the other in the same even voice. "Sit down, won't you?"

"No, I haven't had any breakfast yet." He went over to the window through which Henry Garnett had watched the forbidden things of the night-time pass. "Change your clothes and come with me to get something to eat," he said.

"No, I thank you. I haven't had my plunge, you know, and I don't like to hurry. You see, I

am dropping into the laxness of invalidism, already."

"Oh, that's all right—that's good. Take your own time about everything. Pretty view here."

The other ignored the view.

"I waked up this morning thinking about what you told me, Hamilton," he said.

"—Yes," said Alan, a little tardily.

"And it struck me that I'd better put my business matters in shape."

"Yes—I think so."

"There are several things," went on Garnett's colorless voice, while Hamilton stared at the "pretty view," "several things that I'd like to settle up, but I'd probably need some help."

"Want a good lawyer? What's the matter with Pierce Warren?"

"Warren would be all right for the legal steps, but—the matters are, for the most part, confidential—I need—a friend."

"Will I do, Henry?"

"I had thought of you."

"Good, we'll do it together! Now what's our first job?" Instinct turned Alan to the pretty view again, and set his idle fingers drumming on the interposing pane just to show how very natural, how very usual the whole circumstance was.

"That Holbrooke property muddle—that—ought to be straightened; but it is going to require some—tact," said Garnett's voice, behind him.

Alan's drumming fingers stopped still in the act

of descending, but this time he did not look round. There are times when the most merciful thing that a man can do is to refrain from looking another man in the eyes. Hamilton stared at the view again, but he said, "Yes," as naturally as if that world down yonder were only what it looked.

"The heirs are all three living here." It was Henry Garnett's voice again.

Hamilton paused. The next right step was long and dizzy. At length he took it.

"Joe Holbrooke died of tuberculosis while I was at Saint Joseph's hospital," he said. "You were out of town at the time, I think."

"—Why—didn't Joe go West—at once?"

There was a silence—a long silence—and then:

"He didn't have the money—Henry." After a little Hamilton cleared his throat, and shook himself better into his coat.

"Roger and Lucy are living here," he added. "We can get them all right."

"You are friends with them?" asked Henry Garnett.

"Why," replied the other, "I ought to be—I *am*—that is, I'd do anything I could for either of them. But you know how we outgrow—I mean, how we drift away from—our childhood friends sometimes. I am so busy, and then I was abroad so long! I got in touch with Joe at the last, but I haven't seen Roger, to do more than just speak to him, for years. I have the feeling that he avoids me."

Hamilton found it something of a relief to divert

the current of conversation a trifle, but as Henry Garnett did not follow up his lead, he finished with: "When you've had a rest, you know, we'll talk details."

"Oh, yes, there'll be time enough for that. You are very kind, Alan."

When Hamilton did turn round, Henry Garnett was seated before an empty fireplace, gazing into its yawning blackness. He rose, however, as Hamilton moved to go.

"One moment," he said; "you understand, I'm not a religionist—it's a matter of—business."

"I understand," said Alan.

"*Confidential* business," said the other, looking beyond him.

"I understand that, too, and—you may trust me. I'll see you to-morrow."

Garnett took the hand that the other man had been holding out to him for some moments, but dropped it abruptly, saying:

"Thank you—good-by."

As Alan was leaving Garnett's apartments he came near running into Sam Bailey, who also had acquaintances on the top floor of the Empire.

"Halloo, Hamilton!" exclaimed Mr. Bailey in surprise, "Garnett sick?"

"No," said Hamilton.

"Oh-o!" said the other man with a smile; "excuse me."

"Certainly," and Hamilton passed to the elevator.

CHAPTER IX

NINE o'clock P. M. found Hamilton in the Fletchers' pretty living-room, waiting for Faith to come to him.

The day had proved a difficult one for him. From his disquieting morning call at Henry Garnett's chambers, to this evening hour in the place of habitation of the only woman to whom he could look for sympathy, significant things had been happening to him. An important case that was to have been his had been that day transferred to a rival surgeon. He had lost under an operation—an emergency case, else he would not have undertaken it—another patient. That the man's death was in no sense due to fault or failure of his, Hamilton himself knew full well; but he knew also and equally well what a good part of his world would have to say about it. Minor worries, connected with his regular practice, had, with fiendish discrimination, chosen this day upon which to show their heads. Then, too, the wakeful hours that he had spent last night over Henry Garnett and his summons to accounting had exacted their full toll from his day's normal efficiency.

But the scales had turned when he telephoned to Faith that he wanted very much to talk with her about something which was troubling him.

"Come right now," she had answered. And here he was, walking restlessly up and down her sitting-room, listening for her step. But the portières parted before the sound of her light footstep reached his ear, and Faith came to him, and stood with her hand in his and with again that look in her eyes which spoke of understanding.

Hamilton thought he had come to her to get the light of her woman's inspiration on this matter of helping Henry Garnett, but when they were seated together across the little centre-table—when the soft radiance of the shaded electrolier gave yet deeper glimpses into her unfathomable eyes—when she put out one hand and gently touched his own, and asked, "What is it?"—Hamilton found himself telling her all about *himself*, about how his practice was being injured by the unfair rumors that were being spread concerning his state of health, about how his enemies were further seeking to injure him by circulating their own sinister explanation of his accident.

He had never done such a thing before; he had not meant to do it now—this baring his breast to another—this actually saying out the things that were within him! But then, no other woman had touched him, hand and heart and soul, as this woman had touched him, and no man at all would have dared come as close to him, if he could.

And the strangest thing about it was that he was neither sorry nor ashamed, for the woman understood. And now she was saying some sympathetic

things, some encouraging, inspiring things, to him; and he was listening, and—life was not so bad, after all—no, nor yet *half* bad—nor yet *bad* in a degree—rather was it—dear God, it was *wonderful*!

But even as he wondered, the remembrance of Henry Garnett—that cold, silent, shut-in man, that man without the sympathy of these deep woman's eyes—rose up before him. No, surely, it was not Henry Garnett's problem that had most engaged him—but should it not have been? What right had he, Alan, to allow his own easily corrected worries to loom big enough to obscure another man's soul tragedy? And what if that other's need did involve a certain measure of sacrifice on his own part to the demon of gossip—should a *man* hesitate? Because he had been touched to the quick himself, and because he was unusually sympathetic, Hamilton now told himself that he must put thought of himself aside for that other.

"What is it?" asked the woman, after a pause, in which he came to his decision.

"I have poured out to you all my petty worries, when I really came to get the help of your counsel in a matter which is of vital moment to another."

"Why—what is it?" she asked.

"I hardly know how to tell you, or even that I have the right to tell you."

The woman leaned toward him, and her eyes suddenly became the only thing he saw. "Can't you tell *me*?" she asked.

"If—it were about myself—" he replied slowly,

"I could not choose but tell you; but it's about somebody else."

She waited a moment and then asked: "How can I help you, then?"

"You can't unless you know the circumstances." They were silent together for a space, and then he resumed: "You are a stranger here and know none of the parties. I suppose if I were to tell you only the circumstances, without telling who is involved, there would be no breach of faith. I really want your advice."

"I don't see how that could hurt," she agreed.

Then Alan told her how, the night before, the doomed man had come to him, and what had passed between them.

The woman caught her breath. "You—you didn't *tell* him?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I did."

"But you didn't do it *that way*!"

"Yes," he acknowledged.

"*Oh!* Why didn't you make it easy for him?"

"Men," he answered, with a troubled brow, "men don't know how to 'make it easy.' Life, you know, doesn't 'make it easy.'"

"Didn't you try?"

Alan shook his head slowly. "We are just not that way," he said; "I suppose that's why there had to be women. You know how it is at funerals, don't you?—It's that way in life. Men go out and stand on the porches. It's the women who stay inside where the hearts are breaking."

The woman's hand was laid softly on the table.

"It was like that," Hamilton continued. "I was on the *outside*, and there was no woman to be with the breaking heart of him." He got up as he spoke, and went to the mantelpiece. It was as if he were seeking the *outside* here; but he shortly broke out again:

"If only some woman loved him!"

"If only some good woman loved him!" she said.

"I wouldn't care whether she were good or bad," recklessly; "if she *loved* him—that would be quite enough!"

The woman started, but Hamilton was looking away from her. After a brief silence he added:

"I can patch up that body of his—but a woman—a woman would go all the way to perdition after him."

"Or *with* him?"

The man turned to her, and looked deep into her eyes.

"It wouldn't *be* perdition," he exclaimed, "if she were *with* him!"

The long lashes suddenly dropped their curtains over her eyes, and the fire fled in panic from her face. Hamilton was instantly concerned, and came to her side.

"I had no right to impose this story on you," he said with contrition.

"Why—that's not it," she replied, her color rallying quickly; "I—have not felt well to-day. I *want* to know about your friend."

"I have worried you," he insisted.

"No, indeed you haven't," she protested, with a forced smile. "You have no idea with what Christian fortitude I bear other people's troubles."

"Don't pretend to me," said Hamilton, a little brusquely. "Don't I know you?"

"No." She was not smiling now.

Somehow, the man was slightly disconcerted. Still he protested: "Yes, I do. I know you to be the best, the most tenderly sympathetic woman in the world. That's why I come to you instinctively."

"Did—*instinct*—bring you to me?"

"*Faith!*"—He leaned impulsively toward her, but the woman drew back, and asked quickly, but in an even voice:

"This friend of yours—is it panic that drives him, or is his conscience aroused?"

Hamilton passed his hand across his eyes. It was some moments before he replied. When he did speak, he said:

"It is not 'panic.' He hasn't the capacity for panic in his make-up. And yet I could not say that his conscience is awakened."

"It would make a difference, you know," she put in, in the pause. "If this change in him went deep enough to affect his moral self, one would be justified in sacrificing for him; but——"

"That," said Hamilton, deeply thoughtful again, "is what I would give a good deal to know. I have no more idea what he *feels* than you have. But I've got to help him, you know."

"Your profession spoke then."

He looked up questioningly.

"Doctors are always *big* men, if they are men at all," she explained.

"Why," the man answered, "physicians see life stripped of its veneering, you know, and they deal with what they see."

"Yes, but you would seem to practise on the souls of men, too."

"Any man does the thing that appeals to him as urgent. The difference is that we doctors see more of people's necessities."

"Yes," she said, again almost tenderly, "but you grow by the doing."

Hamilton did not reply. He had the feeling that for the time he had laid by the heavy oars of his troubles and was drifting on the beautiful, quiet peace of her understanding sympathy. It was a new sense to the man—this feeling of rest in the fellowship and faith of a woman—and he surrendered himself to the great peace of it in a silence that did not then admit of breaking.

When he took leave of her some time later, she said, as she had said at first:

"You are right in helping your friend; but," she added now, "if I were in your place, I would avoid any appearance of intimacy with him." Then she put an eloquent hand in his, and said in parting:

"Whenever you feel that you need me, you may come to me." And he went out into the night hugging the inspiration, the peace, the solace of her

to his soul, but only to meet in the darkness the lone spirit of Henry Garnett.

But when the morrow came, sunny, buoyant, busy, Hamilton began to wonder if his nerves hadn't been a little overwrought the day before. It is hard for Tragedy to look like herself to a healthy young man who is eight hours' sleep and a hearty breakfast to the good.

He was to meet Henry Garnett to-day. Then, somehow, in spite of the panacea of sleep and feeding, he began to dread the interview. The receiving of a confidence is, perhaps, the heaviest tax demanded of friendship. He would have to go to Garnett's quarters, he supposed. And the thought of those quiet, cold rooms, and the quiet, cold man who could sit all night staring at what he, Hamilton, disliked even to hear about, roused a spirit of protest in the younger, wholesomer man. He would have Garnett come to his office for the interview. Scarcely had the determination been formed, however, when the telephone bell at his elbow rang.

Mr. Garnett was on the phone. Would Doctor Hamilton like to drop in at the hotel with him to lunch, while they talked business?

Two o'clock found them across a small hotel table from each other, with dozens of other men about them, coming and going—some stopping to chat a minute, some signalling cheery greetings to them from a distance. Doctor Bailey and his brother were lunching together at a near-by table, and be-

yond several groups Tom Thornton's bald head shone conspicuous. Swift-footed negro waiters glided here and there.

It was here that friendship's heaviest tax was laid upon Hamilton; but, somehow, the interview was not at all what his antipathy to "scenes" had conjured up. Garnett talked "business" like a business man, and there was not a noticeable falter in his voice during the whole conversation.

Hamilton got another meed of quixotic comfort out of the fact that his companion was to-day wearing a pair of heavily smoked glasses, but he was impatient with himself that he should feel relief at such a circumstance. The man had pleaded weakness of eyes in apology and asked to be allowed to keep on the shades; so the interview was less trying than it might have been, to a young fellow who was rather too keenly sympathetic.

Across a planked steak and sherry, Hamilton learned the essential details of the "Holbrooke property muddle," and that it was to be his to help straighten it out. With the salad course, he heard for the first time of a certain "Jim Ware," whose penniless baby girl had been left to the guardianship and support of Jim's trusted friend, seventeen years ago.

The child had been put in an orphan asylum and left there. To-day Garnett had telephoned for information about her, only to find that she had been lost in the shuffle. The asylum officials had, years ago, given her for trial adoption, but the people

who had taken her had passed her on to others, and they to still others, till, somehow, she had been lost between them. Detective Starnes had been given the scent and would probably locate the girl shortly. When she was found, would Hamilton help exercise guardianship over her and see that she was properly placed at school? Alan was the sort of man whose interest in the girl would not be misunderstood to her own hurt.

Hamilton looked up quickly, but his keen, direct gaze did not avail to pierce the heavily smoked glasses. After a moment, he promised.

Then, there was Tom Thornton—did Hamilton know that he, Garnett, held a large mortgage on Thornton's home for an accumulation of debts at cards? That Hamilton did not know, was evidenced by the look of concern that suddenly clouded his face. He, Garnett, would like to cancel the mortgage, but Thornton was too proud to be approached on the subject. Would Hamilton pretend to purchase the mortgage, and assign it, in some way that would not hurt, to the Thornton children?

Hamilton did not look up this time, in challenge. He was spreading cheese on a wafer, and the process took some time, for it had to be done very carefully. When it was finished, however, he promised to—"think about it."

"You are generous, Henry," he added.

"Not at all," said the other coldly; "dead men don't need money."

Their coffee finished, they lighted cigars and rose

to pass out. It came to Hamilton, as they made their way through the crowded, smoky lobby, that he would advise Garnett strongly to shut up the Empire; but when the street was reached, the words somehow refused to come.

"I think that to-morrow I'll run down to Biloxi for a breathing spell," said the man behind the dark glasses.

"Good!" replied his companion, "and while you are there, take time and make up your mind to cut out stimulants and tobacco."

Garnett's mirthless smile was his only reply, and they parted company after conventional adieus.

But Garnett did not run down to Biloxi as soon as he had intended. Starnes suddenly opened cry on the scent given, and for several days he and Henry Garnett, with Hamilton eagerly assisting, pressed the search for Jim Ware's daughter. That the quest took Garnett, who could not be persuaded to leave the chase to Starnes, into untoward places, was neither here nor there. But that Hamilton, on one or two occasions, insisted on accompanying the man whom he had pledged himself to help, because that man suddenly developed symptoms which augured disaster in case of a shock to him, was unfortunate. That Hamilton was not at liberty to explain, to whomever might be interested, his connection with the man who, in the imagination of many in that town, had come to personify evil, was more unfortunate still.

After a quick, sharp search, however, Starnes

completely lost the scent; and Henry Garnett, disappointed, but relieved, took the first train going south.

Hamilton had driven Garnett to the station as an added act of friendship, but as he stood at the grating and watched the man cross the many tracks to his train, he all at once realized that he had got not one whit nearer to him in all the excitement of the last few days' search.

CHAPTER X

ONE of the unexpected things that happened to Hamilton in this stage of his little journey in the world was to find, when he went back to his room one afternoon for something he had left, a large tray of pomegranate blossoms on his centre-table.

It was the first thing that greeted his eye when he entered, and he stopped short in the doorway in delight and surprise.

"Now, what do you know about that?" he asked himself. In a few moments he was searching among the flame-tipped sprays for the answer. Yes, a little note was hidden 'way down near the bottom of the glowing pile. Hamilton opened the missive, and read with some difficulty:

"Do you happen to have any boyhood memories connected with pomegranates?"

That was all. He turned the sheet over, but there was nothing else. He looked again at the message. It was written in a scattering, almost illegible hand, and the two lines wandered all over the page, as if they had been written by a child—a child, or somebody who was—*blind!*

"God bless my soul, she's after me yet about those pomegranates!" and he broke into a hearty

laugh. *Did he remember?* Alan swelled with reminiscent pride.

"I certainly was one little devil," he boasted all to himself.

In a little while, however, his face changed; and not even the remembered glories of his marauding age availed to keep back the troublous thought:

"Henry Garnett's mother—and she doesn't know! They never let her know!"

Alone on the balcony of the old mansion that toppled over the busy street, Henry Garnett's mother sat and listened—listened to the steps that passed!

Doctor Hamilton's grandboy might—but, no, as Frederick had said, the world had passed them by. That brown-eyed, rascally boy, he, too, had passed, careless, forgetting! She really ought not to have sent those flowers. That was very, very foolish of her! But, then, he wouldn't remember. He belonged to the age that didn't remember. It had seemed such a delicious little joke while she was perpetrating it; but now, somehow, the life had gone out of it. Frederick was right—there was no place in this new order of things for remnants of the old—the old, that was so different!

She sighed and turned again to listen. Footsteps!—always footsteps—and always going by!

Here a firm, aggressive one, but—going—going—

Again, the dancing feet of a little child—dancing past. And a curly head would have been so good

to pat! One must have Caleb get some candy, some pretty *red* candy, to keep on hand for emergencies—that little thing *might* have stopped!

Another! A slouching, uncertain tread this time—a negro, no doubt! Maybe an aged negro who remembered the good old times. One really wouldn't object, you know, if *he* were to stop and chat awhile. He could sit on the step there at one's feet. That kind understood so well, felt so keenly. *They* remembered! But the uncertain step slouched by.

And now a heavier—but not *that* one! The step from beyond the grave had passed that way one time only. They had not bade it enter—it had passed!

They all, all passed!

And now the footsteps were being swallowed up, for it was growing late and the mingled, bewildering whirl of autos had increased. The noise of belated, hurrying traffic and the shouting of boisterous negroes mingled with the vibrating roar of these panting steel monsters that one heard about but could not picture. In the din and confusion one lost even the despairing hope which the passing footsteps of the uncaring generation waked.

But listen! One of the steel monsters was slowing up—*stopping*! Could it be possible? But no, it must be that they only wanted to wind the creature up—and yet——

Dear God! Had the feet of the uncaring turned this way at last?

"This is Alan Hamilton, Mrs. Garnett," a deep voice said, just before her old heart broke with the

suspense. "I dropped in to warn you that you can't buy me off with flowers"—(her withered hands were in a strong, young clasp now)—"I'm going to have some pomegranates when thieving time comes round again. Grandfather's got another flop coming to him."

"Oh, you dear, dear boy!" She was all unconscious that big tears were dripping from her sightless eyes, "you *do* remember——!"

"That grandfather 'turned over in his grave' when I stole your pomegranates?—Yes, ma'am, I remember."

"I declare," her voice broke between a laugh and a sob, "I shouldn't have told you that—it was too terrible—too horrifying!"

He gave her slight hand a squeeze. "Don't you bother a minute about that. I was more interested than anything else, in the phenomenon. I started down after him, once, to see if he really had got his back up, but they caught me and licked me into a change of purpose before I got him exhumed."

They laughed together—this new generation, that didn't care, and the old, that was so different!

"*Why, my dear!* But sit down, son, sit down. I'm sorry Mr. Garnett is not here to welcome you, but he's down-town."

"I'm sorry, too," said Alan perfunctorily, "but my call is mostly to you. I get the chance to see Mr. Garnett down-town sometimes."

He took a seat close beside her. "You see, I'm not scared of you now," he teased.

"I certainly did give it to you," she laughed in reminiscence.

"Yes, ma'am, you certainly did. You gave me a pomegranate in each hand, and my pockets full of tea-cakes and candy——"

"*Red* candy," she corrected eagerly.

"Yes, *red* candy," said Alan "all the time you were telling me that I had eyes like my mother's, and what an awful, awful thing it was for the son of a gentleman to *steal*." Alan leaned over and patted her on the hand. "Dear lady," he said, "you didn't seem troubled about the sons of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker."

"*Naturally*," said the dear lady.

"Naturally," agreed Alan, and he smiled. "But I haven't told you yet what a bright spot you made in my colorless room and—experience—with your flowers," he added.

"It was such a rich joke, Alan, I couldn't resist the temptation."

"And I'm glad you couldn't. You see, I'm the winner all round—I get the flowers—and the memories; and then I get the excuse to come and sit with you a little while."

The withered cheeks turned pink, and the aged face grew pitifully eager.

"Why, I'm charmed to have you, Alan. And I'd like to have you drop in often, whenever you feel that you'd enjoy a chat or find time hanging heavy on your hands. I'll tell you, come and spend the day with me, sometimes."

The smile that crossed the young man's face was more pitying than tears. "That is a sweet privilege," he said, unconsciously adopting the phraseology which his grandfather must have used to this and other gracious ladies in the days that shall know us no more forever. "But I'm very, very busy—I've really had to deny myself the pleasure of spending the day with my friends, but if I might have *carte blanche* to drop in on you when I can snatch a few minutes, I'd like so much to come."

"Oh, Alan"—it was almost a cry—"I'll be *watching* for you!"

"I'll *come*."

"Frederick—that's Mr. Garnett, my husband, you know—thinks I'm foolish to be always wishing. He says the world has passed us by."

The young man's face grew earnest.

"There isn't any way but *forward* for a courageous people, is there?" he questioned.

"No," she said, still with a troubled brow, "but—he thinks—our young men have forgotten."

"May I tell you a secret?"

"Yes, son."

"It is because we remember so poignantly that we must needs seem to forget. If we allowed ourselves to brood over the past, you know, we wouldn't be fit to wrestle with the present. We are having our fight, but only God and the devil know what it is costing us."

"And may I tell Frederick that you say so?" And her old face caught something of the spirit of his own

"Tell him for me," he replied, "that we young men are the sons of our fathers."

They were silent together—for a space—this new generation that "didn't care" and the old that was "so different." Then he led her into topics of present-day interest, and she followed eagerly, for the blind are always young.

Hamilton was telling her about a new residence suburb and describing the delightful picturesqueness of it, when he noticed that she had turned an eager ear to the street, up which now approached a bevy of half-grown girls.

"Speaking of pretty pictures," he laughed, dropping into her mood, "you ought to see that bunch!"

"High-school pupils?—those gay little, slim little girls in rainbow colors?"

"Like a cluster of hollyhocks coming up the street."

"You like them, Alan?"—eagerly.

"Sure!—I mean, yes, ma'am!"

"Frederick doesn't care for them. He doesn't understand them like you and I do, Alan."

Hamilton looked into her smiling face. Blind and seventy! And yet—to understand! Was this what it was to be a *woman*? But she was speaking again.

"My Henry likes that kind too. He is so buoyant and gay and *young*!" She caught her breath with a sobbing sigh. "Oh, I suppose it *has* been 'years'—but the dead, you know, are always young."

The blind and the dead are always young, echoed

the man's heart within him, *and women who understand!*

"But who is this, Alan—this one alone?"

"Another girl, Essie Holbrooke—Roger's daughter, you know."

"But why is she heavy-hearted?"

"*Is she?*" he asked, with a curious look into her old face.

"Why, yes; don't you hear?"

Alan looked again at the girl, and then he tried to tell what his man's eyes saw.

"She's very *sensibly* dressed," he commented.

To his wondering surprise the old face saddened.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Why, her skirt is wide enough for her to step in—and her shirt-waist is plain and substantial."

The shadows deepened. "What a pity! Why isn't she like the others, Alan?" Hamilton began to glimpse something new and strange.

But she was waiting for his reply, so he answered to her question: "They are very poor. I suppose that's it."

He realized when it was too late that he had made a mistake, for he remembered now to have heard that they made a practice of keeping her in ignorance of distressing things.

"You don't tell me that the Holbrookes have lost their property, Alan?" she was saying, with deep concern.

"Yes'm, they have lost it," he said, for he now saw no other way out.

"But how did it happen?"

"It—would be hard to tell." And it was—*too* hard for Alan.

"Why isn't that child with the others?" she questioned.

Alan stumbled again. "I fancy it's on account of her mother's being so ordinary. Roger married one of old Martin Turner's girls, you know."

"—No, I *didn't* know! You don't *tell* me—Why, what on earth made him *do* such a thing?"

Alan was so instinctively truthful that he could find nothing better than the facts of the case to offer now, so he said simply:

"Their property was made away with when Joe and Roger were boys, you see. They went to work in Turner's butcher shop because there was no other opening for them, and they were too proud to accept help. At seventeen, Roger married Turner's pretty, buxom daughter, and—had to go with her, that's all."

Hamilton was put to his trumps after that to dispel from the saddened face the distress that he had unwittingly brought to it; but he stayed and stayed, and discovered, out there in the street, one bright thing after another, till he thought he had effectually dissipated the shadow cast by Essie Holbrooke's dark, substantial waist.

Then he rose to go, but he was not allowed to depart till he had promised to come again "very soon." As he stood for departing, the old lady said eagerly, but tremblingly:

"Alan, you'll think me a silly old woman—but I want to ask a favor, a foolish favor, of you before you go. Would you mind, son?"

"Don't 'ask,' command me."

"Then lean down here and let me put my hands on your head and shoulders. I want to see through my touch your splendid young manhood—I was the mother of a son, once——"

Alan sank to his knees, behind the screen of tall banisters, and pressed the withered hands which were still in his keeping to his cheeks. He caught a glimpse of the glory that transfigured her old face as her touch first rested upon him, and then lost it—in the mist.

"They tell me that you are handsome, son," she was beginning. "Yes, your features are nice and straight."

As her soft touch outlined his profile, there came a change upon his face. It was as if her mothering hands conjured off the years, and what they had brought of disillusionment, and left the man a sweet-faced boy.

"Now, isn't that wonderful?" she was saying. "I declare, heredity is the *strangest* thing! You've got your grandfather's nose exactly—but his face was a little squarer. Your grandfather had a strong face, my dear. Now, my Henry's was like that. But I like yours, too," catching herself quickly; "it's more regular, and just as strong, I dare say, only—another type."

"I guess my little mother's sentimental sympathy

of temperament trimmed off the Hamilton jaw a bit," the young fellow laughed, all unhurt.

"Of course," she assented, with a note of deep relief in her voice, "and it's all a matter of taste. I like your type—next to Henry's—people all have their preferences, don't they, son? Now, I'm very fond of curly hair, especially for boys. Yours curls—*doesn't* it?"

She touched him lightly on the hair, and her old face changed:

"*Straight?*" She did not succeed in veiling the disappointment in her first broken exclamation, but her voice was placating, soothing, as she added: "Yes, straight hair is pretty too. I'm sure yours is very, very pretty—your mother liked straight hair, *didn't* she, son?"

"Yes, ma'am, I believe I remember that she did."

"And your eyes?"—for her hands did not linger on his waveless hair—"are they quite strong, Alan?"

"Yes'm, *very* strong," but a mist suddenly clouded them.

"My Henry's eyes were strong—like his father's."

Alan pressed the withered little hands to his eyes.

"Some day," he said, "when we both have time, I want you to talk to me—about Henry."

"Oh, Alan, may I? *May* I?" Her captive hands were shaking even in his strong clasp. "Frederick won't let me talk about him—he feels his death so deeply! You know, son, my boy sowed a few wild oats before he died—just a few wild oats—they all do, you know. He was so young and—and buoy-

ant—he didn't mean any harm! But he and his father had a falling-out about something they themselves never really understood. They couldn't have understood, Alan, because they couldn't make it plain to me, and I am not a stupid woman. Then—Henry—died—away from home—without his father's ever telling him he was sorry for the way he had treated him."

Alan's clasp tightened.

"And Frederick can't bear to hear his name mentioned—it brings his own unjustness so terribly home to him."

The young man's face was pained as he tried to answer her.

"Mothers," he said, "entertain annunciation angels and keep always something of heavenly grace in their hearts—but we, poor devils— Mrs. Garnett, I have no doubt that Henry's father suffers more than you understand."

"Why, Alan!—son—am I—oh, I *am* hard on him! —I must try—try harder still!"

Hamilton leaned over and kissed her white forehead in good-by.

"I am coming soon to hear you talk about Henry. And some day—I want to talk to you."

Henry Garnett's mother! And they have never let her know! he was saying to himself when the chauffeur asked:

"Which way, sir?"

CHAPTER XI

"WHICH way, sir?" the chauffeur had asked, and Alan had replied as if by inspiration:

"To Mrs. Thornton's."

He was going to Maggie, for this was one of the times he turned to her. Alan was by no means verbally confidential with his old chum, for he was more than usually reticent. Still a condition of static confidence did exist between them, and he gave frequent proofs of his own recognition of it by dropping in on her without regard to moods and tenses.

Maggie and her sons were on the front veranda—the bigger boys disposed on the steps, and Tommy, sullen, stocky, rebellious, backed against the railing. It needed no special gift of insight to see that there was trouble in the camp.

"What's the matter?" demanded Alan, after he had duly shaken hands with a very tight-mouthed Maggie, and taken a seat on the top step near her chair.

"Mamma's mad with Tommy 'cause——"

"Hush, Philip," from Maggie.

"Why, what's up?" Alan appealed to her this time.

"To *think* that a *son of mine*——" Maggie pinned the bayed youngster to the banisters with her look.

"Tommy's skeered to hold the calf off, an' mamma's mad with him for bein' a coward," Archibald explained, by right of primogeniture.

"I *ain't* skeered o' no calf," this from the bayed Tommy. "That calf kick me, I'll knock he head off!"

"Oh, you're mighty brave, now that the calf is not around to hear," retorted his mother.

"An' mamma's makin' him be three years ol' 'cause he's a 'fraid cat—she says she ain't *never* goin' to let him be four years ol' agin till he licks that calf," interrupted another.

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Alan of her, with a smile in his eyes.

"If Tommy fools with me," replied the mother, dropping into the vernacular amid which she lived and moved and had her being, "if Tommy fools with me, I'll not only make him be three years old, but a three-year-old *girl*, at that!"

"Now ain't that puttin' it up to 'im?"

"Hush, Billy!" then to Alan, in an aside: "Think of me measured against a baby calf as an alternate terror, won't you."

"Why don't you speak to his father?" asked Alan, as he passed his hand over his mouth.

"I did," she answered in a low tone.

"What did *he* say?"

"Said *let Billy hold the calf!*"

"Where *is* the calf?" asked Alan, of Billy.

The interrogated imp widened his eyes frightfully at the enforced three-year-old, as he replied to Alan:

"Out yonder in the lot lookin' over the fence for Tommy."

"Fixin' to eat 'im alive," put in Philip.

"Stay with us, Uncle Alan, an' watch 'im romp over Tommy," added the eldest, "he's a bull, an' he don't take nothin' off nobody."

"*Shut up!*" said Alan peremptorily. He turned to Maggie. "How do you expect the child to screw up his courage when you let these others devil him like that?"

"I expect a boy who is going to be a *man* to always do what's courageous, and against whatever odds," she retorted, inexorable.

"Maggie"—he had turned to look into her eyes—"you expect too much."

"No, I don't." And somehow they were no longer talking of Tommy.

"It's harder for us to face our supreme issues than women realize," the young man said.

The next moment something of boy interest beckoned from the street, and the three elder youngsters scuttled to the sidewalk. Only Tommy was left—three years old, disgraced! His back was still to the banisters, and his sullen, bowed face to the enemy.

Alan, who was in arm's length of the little bayed animal, laid a kind hold of him and drew him quietly within the circle of his protecting arm.

"Tommy and I are not afraid of that old calf," he averred sturdily. "We are going to show you this very evening how we can hold him! Who's he, I'd

like to know, that he should be having things all his own way?"

From that, and with his arm still about the child, Hamilton went on to speak of boys and calves in general, and of memorable conquests of all kinds that had called for heroes and heroism. He fought the Crusades all over again, and told how Godfrey held off the Saracen, not with a calf rope indeed, but with the strength of his Christian arm. He spoke of Charlemagne, even in the face of the Paynim's lowing call from the back lot, and painted a vivid word-picture of the lion-hearted king of England who was—inferentially—not afraid of any calf that ever drew the breath of life. Then Alan pushed up the little sleeve well above the clay line, and showed the faint traces of veins upon the chubby arm. Tommy's own grandfather, who had had this self-same blood in his veins, had planted his colors thirty-three feet within the Yankee lines before he fell, wounded all but to death.

That settled it for the calf.

"Let's get him now," whispered Alan, for he had caught the leap of fire to Tommy's eyes.

For answer, Tommy turned and walked proudly through the house, Hamilton following at heel, and Maggie bringing up the rear of the charging host. They were going to have it out with the calf. But more than Tommy and Hamilton and Maggie trooped along that line of march. Charlemagne shouldered against the little avenger as he stalked, Godfrey de Bouillon led the perilous way, he of the

lion heart strode clanking behind him, and Warren's fearless color-bearer somehow got bodily into the little duck suit of him—and it only made to fit a boy who oscillated between three and four years old!

Just how it all happened Tommy himself never knew distinctly; at least, so one would judge by the various and sundry accounts he gave of it afterward. But certain it is that—though Charlemagne got himself butted in the stomach, the lion-hearted Richard had his helmet kicked into smithereens, Godfrey of Bouillon got dragged through the chicken trough, over the ash heap, and under a thorn-bush—though Warren's redoubtable sergeant got his little breeches torn nearly off him—that Paynim Yankee bull-calf stood at last defeated, licked! It is of record also that Uncle Alan, whose sole part in the affair had been to stand aloof with mamma and cheer, had to interfere in the moment of victory in behalf of the conquered, for he saw the Christian hosts close in upon the vanquished, and read death to the conquered in the move. I say it is of record, for just at the height of cataclysmic struggle three other spectators mounted the side gate, and sat transfixed. It was not till the Paynim, backed into the corner by the chicken house, hollered "'nough," that Archibald and Philip and Billy found voice.

"Lordy, look a' *yon—der*!"

"Jim—min—y!"

"Beat the stuffin' out of 'im, Tommy! Beat the stuffin' out of 'im!" they called severally.

It was then that Uncle Alan interfered and led

the tattered, bruised, bloody-nosed, mad little hero to his mother's waiting arms.

"How old is he, mamma?" asked Uncle Alan, as Maggie clasped her next-to-the-baby to her breast.

"Goin' on *five*!" she exclaimed. And then, so unaccountable are women, she buried her face in Tommy's little shoulder with a perfectly unmistakable sob.

Alan always disliked anticlimaxes. He met one on their return march to the front porch in the person of Phyllis Howard. Phyllis stayed awhile and so did Alan; and the result of it all was that he asked her to go to the theatre with him the very next evening, and said, if she didn't mind, he'd call around and take her on some of his professional trips to the country; Maggie often went with him to keep him company. Phyllis didn't mind, and Maggie was openly delighted.

Phyllis was very fond of children, as she often told Alan, and this evening, as usual, she devoted a good deal of her time to picturesque play with Maggie's boys, so Alan got the chance to tell Maggie about his visit to Mrs. Garnett. He spoke of Henry Garnett, but of Henry Garnett from the knowledge point of Maggie's world, for he was under promise.

"He's her own son, Maggie, and she doesn't know," Alan said; "don't you think somebody ought to tell her?"

"No, a thousand times no!"

"But *you* would want to know if one of your

boys—" He stopped in mute surprise at the spasm of pain that passed over her face.

"I'd *have* to know," she said, rallying. "But she is just a frail little flower of a woman—she always was. *She'd* break under it, Alan."

And then, because at parting people always re-adjust to the conventional plane conversations that have suffered upheavals of feeling, he gave an amusing little account of his and the old lady's talk of high-school-girl fashions. But as he spoke of Essie Holbrooke and her substantial, sensible, sufficiently wide clothes, he noticed on Maggie's face something of the wistfulness that had crossed that other, older face when he had described them at first.

"Maggie, dear," he said, "what is it?—I don't seem to understand."

Maggie looked at him with an indefinable shadow in her eyes. "Why, there are some things that won't exactly fit into words," she answered; "but *I'd* rather be anything in the world than young and sensible at the same time!"

He saw Phyllis home across the two hundred feet of dividing lawn, and she told him as they went that she had been to call on his "friend," but had found the lady out—she was so sorry. Mr. Bailey she mentioned as not having been there lately, and she spoke in a tone that somehow managed to convey to Hamilton that this failure of hers to see Mr. Bailey was all because he, Hamilton, objected to the man.

When Alan left Phyllis, however, it was not she

and her failure to see Mr. Bailey that engaged his thoughts, but that "friend" of his who, against all common sense, persisted in remaining a latter-day mystery. Hamilton felt indignant with her that she should thus steadily deny herself to other women. It was unusual, to say the least, and very inadvisable. She was obliged to know that it would create comment. Besides, she needed companionship; he had told her so himself. Now, why in the devil——

The girl was sensitive—morbidly sensitive! Delicately constituted women were often that way—He ought not to blame her and he would not. At some propitious time he would talk to her, and then it would be all right.

CHAPTER XII

THE principal trouble lay in the size of that town; yet, as any sort of definite example of what size not to be, it was no good at all. There were times when it was plainly too big—times when it was too little. It had the faculty, happy or otherwise, of reversing the law of perspective, being meanly small when one was on the spot and restless to get away, but growing generously large and larger as one sped farther and farther away from it and talked more and more about it to people who had never been there to see. It could hardly contain its own citizens when they got “mad” and “swelled up” over local politics—they were solid, always, on national issues—but turned itself into a veritable lonesome waste on the near approach of a go-to-church Sunday.

When it came to figures, the population joined the Ananias club in a body, and regularly, once every ten years, seceded from the Union.

In the light of its citizens' ambitions for it, that burgh loomed colossal, they always replying to inquiries by telling how big it was *going to be* when the Panama Canal got steadied on its legs. In spirit and in truth, however, it was narrow enough for what “they said” to be heard from one side to the other, and far too narrow to give free passage to a decent correction.

Hamilton's principal trouble lay in the size of that town. A bigger place would have been too *big* for that sort of thing; a smaller, too limited. As it was, the place was just the psychological size to make the most of everything said about the young physician to his discredit. He had been too long the fêted, the adored, the irreproachable, for criticism of him not to be peculiarly palatable. As luck would have it, too, the degree of that criticism was just the unfortunate degree for Hamilton. If it had sunk to reprehension or to scandal there would have been indignant refutation; but since it only hovered on the verge of both, the few insinuations against him were echoed freely back and forth till they seemed to be many charges and serious.

If Doctor Hamilton's waiting-rooms were less full these days than was their wont, they were still full enough daily to prolong his hour of consultation till it encroached far too much on the time of his afternoon calls; if the indefinable change in the personnel of his consulters was noted by the doctor he made no sign.

Hamilton went about his business with never a deflection to right or to left by reason of any deflection of confidence from him. His hands and his life were very full now; and if he missed a certain something that had been his in time past, his world was left to guess how far that lack affected him. Last night he had failed of re-election as president of the local medical association, when he thought he deserved to go in again—failed, when he thought he



was sure of it! But those who saw him hand over the gavel to Sam Bailey's brother never guessed what lay behind the unmoved front that he presented to them. He had spoken one time only, and then in confidence and to the one person to whom it was possible for him to unbosom himself. For the rest, he was the same thoughtful, self-contained man who had gone to and fro in that town for the past eight years, quietly pursuing a work that the menders of men and the Maker of Men prosecute in much the same spirit.

Men may be hungry, but the grocer knows that that is no affair of his unless the coin comes across the counter. They may be cold and in darkness, but the coal man and the light man feel no added responsibility. They may be ragged, but the circumstance suggests nothing to the clothier except a chance to sell to somebody whose patent business it is to clothe the naked.

But let a man be sick in body and in spirit and, whether he have the price or not, his condition at once becomes the business of the doctor and of the Maker of Men.

Hamilton sat at his desk on one of these overfull days, receiving and helping and dismissing one after another. The hour for consultation was nearly up, but still the door between his consulting room and the outer office opened and shut periodically, admitting another as each patient departed.

A mother with a sick baby this time! Hamilton let the little claw-like fingers close over one of his

own as he talked to the mother and smiled reassuringly. When she was ushered out he looked after her and thought of how the halo of motherhood would glorify a certain other woman's face.

The door was pulled-to again, and he was alone with another mother—one who was asking that he talk to her boy about the harvest that must follow his present sowing. He had no father—boys always listened to men.

Hamilton himself opened the door for her as she departed with his promise.

He was thinking fleetingly how men who do not sow the wind still often reap the whirlwind, when a sullen, beaten man out of a job was admitted. The conference was a long one. The man needed an operation at once.

Nothing doing—the man was out of a job!

It seemed, however, that that was "all right." Hamilton could arrange for a bed at Saint Joseph's, where consecrated hands were always ready to minister without price when the price was wanting, with nobody to know but the One to whom they were consecrate. As for the operation, that was between physician and patient. No, that was all right—doctors often did those things. With the promise to meet him at Saint Joseph's at a stated hour that afternoon, Hamilton dismissed the man, putting his hand on the rough shoulder as he bade him good-by.

A worn-out little school-teacher next, demanding her long overdue bill—a scrap to a finish but no

bill! Then a seam binder from Sullivan's, who wanted to know in parting if it would be all right to wait about taking the tonic till the first of the month—she didn't have the price just then. By a happy chance, Hamilton did have the price right then. In departing with misty eyes, the seam binder from Sullivan's was jostled by a portly man of wealth who came fuming in about the amount of a certain bill that had been sent him. The doctor was quiet but unyielding—the man of wealth could pay his price or nothing at all. Eventually, the disgruntled paid and went out, to happen upon Sam Bailey at the corner.

With a feeling of relief that the press of the morning's work was over, Hamilton drew his desk phone to him and called up a number for which he referred to a pencil note on his desk blotter.

"Has Mr. Garnett come back from Biloxi yet?" he asked.

At an answer in the negative, he put down the phone and turned, only to find that yet another was waiting to see him. A stylishly dressed, closely veiled woman had been ushered in by the attendant.

Hamilton rose and placed a chair for the lady, but the next moment he recognized her.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Here? Why, what's the matter?"

Faith put back her veil and disclosed a face that amply justified his first fear that something was amiss. It was a face from which the fire had un-

accountably vanished. She looked anxious, impatient.

"You are not sick?" he asked quickly. "You wouldn't have come——"

"Oh, no. I want to talk to you on business."

"You should have sent for me." When she had taken the chair he placed for her, Hamilton sat down again, and said with concern:

"Tell me about it. You know how I bring all my petty worries to you."

"It's about your worries." The woman put one restless hand on the desk slide between them in a little characteristic gesture of pleading, and continued hurriedly:

"I want to take back what I said to you the other night."

"If you are going to take back anything you've ever said to me," he broke in, with a smile, "I've got to be the one to choose what shall be rendered up to you. There are a few things I don't intend to part with."

The hand was instantly withdrawn, and a swift, on-guard look passed over her sensitive features; but her mission was quickly to the front again.

"When you told me about going into that bar-room to meet the man you were interested in," she continued, ignoring or forgetting his interruption, "and about your associating with him——"

"Did I say I was 'associating with him'?" he asked.

"—No—but you know what I mean. I told you

then that I thought you were doing the right thing, the courageous thing. But I was mistaken, I didn't know, I didn't understand——"

"You didn't understand what, Faith?"

"You were so careful to keep your promise of confidence that I didn't dream it was Henry Garnett you were talking about."

The man started distinctly. "And how did you find out?" he asked.

"My maid told me people were saying——"

Hamilton pushed back his chair. It was a slight movement and not too quickly made for courtesy, but all the same it spoke his impatience.

Another swift change passed over the mobile face into which he was looking now with unpleasant directness. "I was *not* listening to the ordinary gossip of servants," she flashed. "Yetta is an educated, intelligent woman, and she has been with me for seven years. She is the only thing in the world that loves me, and I know that I can allow her to talk to me in confidence."

Hamilton had a fleeting recollection of the maid's having told him at the hospital that she had been in her mistress's employ only a few weeks. He leaned slightly back so that the light of the window might fall directly upon his visitor's face, his own suddenly grim with a something he could not have put into words.

The woman's glance wilted momentarily under his own, but she rallied her spirit quickly.

"Am I, or am I *not* your friend?" she challenged.

"I am yours, Faith. But you mustn't——"

"If you are my friend, I *will* ! I will say what I think you ought to hear, whether you like it or not. Now, then, Henry Garnett is bad, *bad* ! You couldn't save him in a thousand years— No, hush till I finish ! And you are jeopardizing your own interests, at least, by seeming to associate with him."

"And if I choose to jeopardize my interests?"

"But your reputation !"

Hamilton made a gesture of impatience.

"Why, the whole thing is absurd, Faith. I was half sick and wholly foolish when I told you that senseless gossip. A man's reputation isn't a piece of bric-à-brac to be handled so delicately."

"What if the man happens to be the leading physician in a small, gossiping town?"

"I believe that people who consider their own possible injury in the face of the thing to be done are what we call 'cowards,'" he replied steadily.

"But Henry Garnett is only *afraid*," she protested. "He is incapable of any sort of spiritual awakening. He is dead cold and evil to the core !"

"I don't know that. But I do know that he is not fit for death, and that he has shortly to face it."

"He doesn't deserve to live !"

"Who are *you* that you should say it?"

Hamilton was fairly startled by the effect of his words upon her. A shot through the heart would make a man drop white like that.

But she had lifted her blanched face from her covering hands even before he had time to protest

that he was sorry for his brusqueness. "This is one of my mean days," he said to her; "I got up this morning feeling that I wanted to get even with somebody."

"If—if you'd only stay like this," she said, summoning a pitiful little smile. "If we could talk it out calmly, rationally together, we might get somewhere."

"Very well," he agreed. "Now, I'm going to be not only polite but perfectly reasonable. Say on."

"First," she began, at once and in deep earnest, "you let your conscience run away with you, and you are too sympathetic."

For a woman to say that—for *her* to say it! And he had dreamed of a woman whose heart was all sympathy and whose spirit could lift him to the skies! The man sat dumb.

"As his physician," she was saying now, "you can do everything that is necessary for him. You can even lecture him on the evil of his ways if you want to waste your time. But this matter of trying to help him untangle all his wrong-doings, as a sop to the Cerberus he fears—this having to be with him here and there—is plainly out of the question. Don't you see that it is?"

"No," he said, "leaving out the question of 'duty,' a man ought to be able to go where and with whom he chooses. Other men go with men they would not introduce to women. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because men to whose interest it is to injure you will not have it that way, and you know it! Now,

don't you see that it's a matter of hands-off for you? It seems to me that that is as plain as daylight."

"Problems are complex only to those whose business it is to solve them," he answered. "Outsiders always know exactly how everything ought to be done."

"You promised," she reminded him, a little distantly.

"There wasn't anything impolite or unreasonable in that, was there?" And both felt the chill that had settled between them.

"It seems so illogical," he said, after a pause.

"What?"

"That *you* should be unfeeling. I had thought your sympathies as deep as a poor devil's need!"

"Alan," it was the first time she had ever called him by his name, and a subtle change came over the man with the word, "I am thinking of *you*. I am thinking of the yet greater harm that will come to your practice if you persist in this."

"But you must not consider me. Besides, I have been thinking lately that maybe I had exaggerated to you and to myself the possible injury to me."

"You have not exaggerated it," she said, with a deep line of worry between her level brows. "Every appearance of yours in public with Henry Garnett but gives color to that story about the cause of your accident."

"Well, say that it does. Isn't it still my duty to

help Henry Garnett when he is friendless and dying? Just what would you think of a man who stopped for people's tongues?"

"But you misconceive your duty," she urged. "Your duty is to your profession. You have a wonderful gift for surgery, they say. Now, what right have you to do anything that would cause a loss of confidence in the steadiness of your nerves, and through that send men who need you more than Henry Garnett does to surgeons whose touch is less sure?" That she had struck a vulnerable spot was made manifest by the face of the man, and the speaker pressed on: "You told me the other night that you hadn't yet regained confidence in yourself. How are you going to recover that if you let things like this stay on your nerves?"

"I'd hardly get back my grip, Faith," he began after a dead pause, "with the betrayal of a dying man's trust on my conscience— Are you feeling bad?"

"No, no!" She had risen abruptly and Hamilton followed her lead without protesting, but with another quick glance into her drawn face.

At the door she suddenly broke out in an impassioned protest:

"Alan, *please* don't! You are driving head-on against another stone wall, and——"

"But there will not be any quivering wreck of humanity for me to bear on my conscience— *Faith!* What's the matter?—What is it?"

"Nothing."

"But there is something—tell me! Things ought not to upset you like this, are you sick?"

"No—but I must go."

He opened the door for her. "Faith," he said, summoning his every-day tone, "you and I have both taken this thing too seriously. It is nothing, nothing at all. Whatever there is of gossip will die a natural death, so don't give another thought to it. —I am sorry I ever told you about it, to begin with."

He accompanied her down to her waiting car. Then he went back to his consulting room and sat down at his desk again. He wanted to think.

Hamilton was disappointed—disappointed and—puzzled. His spirit of inspiration had failed him—she was just a woman, after all! The other night she had been all that his man's heart and his man's soul had gone wearying for all the years of his manhood. To-day she had not been able to rise to even his heights. He, somehow, felt reproachful toward her, and his reproach was measured to him by the depth of his previous joy in her. And then——

How out of all rational proportion was her feeling on this subject they had just all but quarrelled over! —Had she been perfectly frank with him?—Who *was* she, anyway?

Late that afternoon the nose of Hamilton's car was jammed against the curb where several young men draped themselves over and about a letter-box, and the owner called to one of them, as the chauffeur disappeared on an errand:

"Get in here, Bill, I need a man about your size."

"Wish I could, Doc, but I've got to get a shine. Take Simpson, if it's size you're after."

There were a few minutes of good-natured wrangling, and then the man summoned mounted the seat beside the doctor.

"What you going to do with me?" the impressed demanded as the two sat waiting the chauffeur.

"I'm going to take you to call on a lady."

"*That* you ain't!"

"Yes, I am too."

"Who, I'd like to know?"

"Wait and see."

There was more wrangling and another triumph for the doctor; and then the chauffeur appeared with a huge box of flowers which he deposited on their knees.

"American Beauties?" the impressed inquired, measuring the box with his eyes.

"Yes."

"Whyn't you send 'em up?"

"Rather take 'em myself."

"The lady in the flower store says it takes her so long to cut off the briars she's a good mind to charge you extry." It was the chauffeur who ventured the puzzling information. And he began backing the car out for a start.

"Cut off the thorns! You *didn't*!" exclaimed the impressed caller.

"Why not?" demanded Hamilton.

"*Why?*" demanded the impressed.

"So the lady can keep them on her lap and play with them in comfort."

"Keep American Beauties on her lap to play with! You're kiddin' me!"

"No, I'm not. I take her flowers two or three times a week—to play with."

"It's a baby—named for the doctor, in gratitude!"

"No, it isn't."

"Do you go to see her often?"

"I run in for a kiss nearly every day."

"Alan Hamilton, is that a grown woman you're talking to me about?"

"It is."

"Old?"

"She's one of the youngest people I know."

"Well—a—Alan, is she—a—perfectly at herself?"

"She's nearly the only sane person of my acquaintance."

"And kisses *you*?"

"Every time I call."

"Here, nigger! Let me out of this car!"

But Alan triumphed again, and the car sped on.

"She knows my horn," he said after a little.

"One long blow means 'I'm coming, honey!' and three staccatos, 'Howdy, but I haven't got time to stop!'"

"My father always said," remarked the impressed, reminiscently, "that the only unpardonable sin was 'being a damned fool.'"

"He warned you, did he?" And the car sped on.

"What I want to know is, where do *I* come in on this?" urged the impressed, after a little.

"Women like variety."

"But why *me*? Why not Charlie Sibley, or Simpson, or Dave?"

"Because," said Alan emphatically, "because, by the grace of God, you're *curly-headed*!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE very next day a note came to Alan, saying:

You are disappointed in me, and I know it, but please don't judge me harshly.

I haven't changed my mind in regard to what we differed about, but I'm fearing now that both of us were too positive in our expressions of opinion. We are friends, I believe. I am wondering if friends can't have a little more patience with, a little more faith in, each other.

"A little more faith!" The phrase touched Hamilton poignantly. Had he been disloyal to her in his thoughts?—Hadn't he?—Well, not in his thoughts, perhaps, but once or twice the *feeling* had crept in—dear, dear girl!—it was the last time, the very last!

Yetta, the yellow negress who, for some unaccountable reason, was always repellent to Hamilton, had brought the missive.

Doctor Hamilton turned his back on the girl when he opened the note, perhaps because he did not wish his countenance to be under scrutiny by her keen black eyes as he read. With his back to her still, he wrote a letter of four pages which said on the lines and between them some heartfelt, friendly things and some very self-reproachful ones. After all, Henry Garnett was a subject that need not again

come up between them. He realized now that he had been inconsiderate in burdening Faith with things that ought never to have been brought to her attention. She didn't understand, of course. It was natural that a woman should not understand. As for himself, he was always letting things get out of proportion like that! Just because he had made a personal sacrifice in trying to help Henry Garnett, he had let the man and his problems loom big in his near perspective, when they ought to be subordinate. He would do better.

The negress took the answer in respectful silence, and departed. Hamilton looked after her. Why couldn't he feel toward her as he did toward other domesticated creatures—that is, not at all? Why should she silently insist on coming out of the negligible setting in which she was properly placed, into his displeasure?

During his afternoon calls that day, Hamilton found himself next door to Roger Holbrooke's place of habitation. And he was emerging from the house at which he was calling when he spied a slight, bent figure on the Holbrooke porch.

Acting on impulse, as he so often did, Hamilton crossed the few feet of sterile yard that always hangs, dogged, about the homes of the poor, and ascended the narrow front steps.

"Howdy-do, Lucy? It's a long time between meetings with us, isn't it?"

"Why—yes!" The woman seemed disconcerted. "Yes, come in, Doctor Hamilton."

"You didn't use to be so formal with me in the days when you were wont to turn me down in the spelling class, Lucy," he laughed; but it was with troubled intentness that he looked into her face. For some reason—he was wondering what—he had had no conversation with this old schoolmate of his for years, in spite of the fact that the two of them were living out their destinies within the narrow limits of the same provincial town; and he experienced something very like contrition at the thought, now, as he looked wistfully into her worn face for traces of the talented, ambitious girl that he remembered.

"But you are a more important personage than you were when you used to work my arithmetic problems for me—Alan," Lucy was replying.

"Not to you, I hope," he said, as he held her slight hand a moment. The slight hand closed a little on his own, as Lucy hesitated.

"Alan," she at length said, and with a visible effort, "I want to tell you that I appreciate your trying to—to help Joe——"

"Don't, Lucy!—I'm late about—many things!"

They stood for a moment without speaking, and then the woman said, in a lowered tone:

"Roger doesn't know—" she left off as if she expected him to understand.

Hamilton looked a little puzzled, but he said:

"Certainly," and then— "Where is Roger? I want to see him."

"Out in the back yard, somewhere. Come in, and I'll find him."

Hamilton would greatly have preferred to remain out on the porch, but he submitted himself to be led through a narrow, uncarpeted hall into a close, hot little "parlor."

Lucy left him there, surrounded by India-ink portraits and the things that go with India-ink portraits, and went to find her brother.

Hamilton made a conscious effort to get a definite impression of the place, and began to look about him with an eye to detail. The furniture was substantial and decent enough, but it was of golden oak, and the upholsterings were, almost as a matter of course, of varicolored plushes. It had a brought-in-and-set-down look—not at all as if it had been born and reared there. Very stiff, very white, very open-patterned lace curtains hung over thin shades which the physician, who knew half the humble interiors in town, wouldn't have dared to manipulate—so surely does the burnt child shun the fire. A fierce-looking head of a Hindoo on the small mantel jostled a blue china cow at its right and was crowded against by a gilt cup and saucer on its other side. Everything that the genius of this home wanted to show, but ought to have smashed to pieces, was spread out on the mantel or table or upright piano. Not one suggestion anywhere of Holbrooke refinement!

After one swift, appraising review, Hamilton turned and looked out of the window. He was thinking of the spacious, shadowy coolness of the old Holbrooke home on the hill where he had so often

gone to play with Joe and Roger. It might not have been handsome, that home, measured by inflated modern standards. It probably was not "artistic." But there had been a certain something about it, an air, a dignity, a distinction that was one with the race which had called it into being, and that was no more related to this china cow than if they belonged on different planets.

Hamilton was just pondering why, in the recent fateful irruption of Martin Turners into the conscious life of the South—why it was that the china cow so often survived every trace of that indescribable other thing, when Lucy and her brother entered.

The Roger Holbrooke of Alan's reminiscence had been perhaps gentler, kindlier than the verities justified; for Memory—perhaps herself but a symbol of the mercy of God—tends to immortalize for us only that which is beautiful and good. The appearance of the man who came in and shook hands with Alan gave him a distinct shock, for it was the first time in years that they had come face to face in an interview. True, they had walked the same town for most of the years that had divided them, but Hamilton's way had lain chiefly along the "avenues," and Holbrooke's along the less pretentious "streets." Now, when they had come together at an unexpected crossing of their ways, Hamilton looked into the face of a man grown hard. It was not until that moment that he began even to suspect the stupendousness of the task before him.

As the two men shook hands, the sister made some slight excuse, and started to withdraw, but Hamilton detained her.

"This concerns you, too, Lucy. Don't leave us."

Before they were seated, however, Mrs. Roger Holbrooke came in to shake hands and to assure Hamilton several times over that she was "pleased to meet" him. There was no denying the fact that she was more distinctly cordial than her husband. She was a large, coarse-featured, thick-skinned woman, and she carried a coarse-featured, thick-skinned baby on her arm, and was followed at intervals by three other coarse-featured, thick-skinned children of varying ages. If the fit indeed survive, Martin Turner's fitness for immortality was abundantly demonstrated in Roger Holbrooke's progeny.

Holbrooke introduced his wife and children with punctilious courtesy, and then seemed to forget their existence.

He and his sister and their visitor indulged in a few reminiscences by way of opening up the interview; and Mrs. Holbrooke, who had signified her intention of staying by taking the chair her husband placed for her, divided her time between scolding the children and trotting the baby noisily.

The conversation was broken again by the entrance of the eldest daughter of the family in response to a call from her mother as she was slipping in the front door. Essie carried several books on her arm and seemed just from study.

"But you don't stay at school this late, surely,"

said the visitor, as he rose to be introduced to this little drab-colored scion of Holbrooke.

"Essie goes to business college in the evenin'," explained the mother; "she's goin' to be a stenographer."

"That's nice," said Hamilton, holding the little slim, cold hand as he said it, and seeing at last that lack of something in the girl which had been so apparent to women that even a blind one had caught it at a glance—"young and sensible at the same time"!

But Essie faded out of their attention after an unanswered remark or two on the part of Hamilton, and he turned to the brother and sister with his delayed mission.

"I came to see you on a matter of delicate and confidential business," he said.

"Mrs. Holbrooke and I have no secrets from each other," said his host quietly.

Hamilton felt reproved. "Certainly not," he replied quickly.

"You children get out!" And Mrs. Holbrooke promptly shooed out the three means in the Holbrooke progression, clumping the one most loath to depart on his straw-colored head to hasten his withdrawal.

"Essie don't never say nothin' to nobody," she then assured Hamilton, as she caught his glance toward the girl. But Essie folded her tents, and stole silently out of her own volition.

The mother sat down again. The father's lined

face cleared in a degree, with the quieting of the tumult.

"It's about Henry Garnett," Alan began again with a feeling of desperation. "He is in almost a dying condition with heart trouble——"

"*At last !*" It was Roger Holbrooke that spoke. Hamilton started and looked at him quickly. Lucy put a hand on her brother's arm.

"He is going to make reparation to you, Roger." It was as if Alan, too, were extending a detaining hand.

"*Is he !*"

"Yes, I am sure he is."

"Are you sure that he *can* ?"

"Roger !" Lucy called his name with quiet emphasis.

Hamilton hesitated. There was something in the air that he could not then quite grasp.

"Why——" he began, "he is very well off, he ought to be able——"

"So *you* believe that way too !"

"*Roger !*" this time with startled emphasis.

Hamilton looked from brother to sister. Roger Holbrooke's face was livid. Lucy's whole apprehensive thought seemed of him.

"You'll have to excuse me if I ask you to make yourself plainer to me, Roger," he said.

Holbrooke's livid face was suddenly thrust across the centre-table that divided them, and his blue-white knuckles tapped fatefully on its surface.

"You know where Joe is, don't you?" he asked.

"Sakes alive, Roger!" exclaimed his wife, "you want the money, don't you?" But Martin Turner's daughter was not then in Holbrooke's universe.

"Is that Lucy Holbrooke, or is it not? I ask you!" her husband was demanding of Hamilton.

Alan followed the direction of his shaking index finger. No, that was not Lucy Holbrooke, and Hamilton knew it. That was just one of Sullivan's pants stitchers that sat, hollow-chested and prematurely gray, before them.

"But you want the money, Roger? You want the *money*," Martin Turner's daughter urged.

"Want the money"? Of course I want what belongs to me! And that is nothing short of that Empire site and interest on it for eighteen years! I could claim the building too. But Garnett put that up. I'll let him move it off my lot, and then see what it is worth to him!"

"The point is, Roger——"

"The point is, Hamilton, I want *Henry Garnett* to face me about it."

Hamilton followed the lead of the infuriated man and rose to his feet also; but his attitude was one of soothing, peacemaking.

"Garnett will come to you, Holbrooke, I have no doubt. It was not his idea that I should shield him in any way, but my own."

"Shield him! Shield *Henry Garnett*——!"

Hamilton put up his hand quickly to interrupt:

"Henry Garnett is *dying*, Roger."

"*Joe Holbrooke is dead!*"

But Lucy had risen too. "Joe is dead indeed, Roger," she almost whispered, "if you can so soon forget."

The lines of the man's face became pitifully taut for a moment as he said:

"Joe was always holding me back. If it hadn't been for him, I'd have settled with Garnett before now."

"Joe was right, Roger," said Hamilton.

"Oh, it's easy for you to say that, Hamilton,"—hardening again, but quiet—"Your people gave you everything you needed for your development, and sent you about your life-work, efficient, grown to full stature. You have no quarrel with fate! Everything that money could do—and money can do a great deal, let me tell you—was done for you."

"But, Roger, money is of so small account compared——"

"Oh, is it? In the old days when we were on an equal financial footing, which one of us led?"

Lucy started forward with parted lips, but Hamilton gave her a significant glance, and then answered her brother gently:

"You," he said.

"Exactly. Well, what's the difference between us now, that you should be able to make more money in a day than I can earn in months?—No—I'll answer—the difference is 'Henry Garnett'! *You* consort with people who don't know my face or my name— The difference is 'Henry Garnett'!"

"Roger," interrupted Lucy, but he paid no heed to her protest.

"You have ambition, pride of race," he declared bitterly. "If you have children, you can give them——"

"But if we get the money from Garnett, Roger, we can give our children just as much." Martin Turner's daughter spoke to comfort him, for he had stopped suddenly and put one hand to his blue-white forehead.

Hamilton turned and walked over to the window.

Lucy Holbrooke took the little coarse-featured baby's head between her hands and kissed it.

"Well, I must be going," at length said Hamilton from the window; and he gave full time for them to get themselves in hand before he turned to say good-by. He shook the cordial hand of Mrs. Holbrooke and responded in kind to the quick, impulsive clasp that Lucy gave him, and then he held out his hand to his host.

"Roger," he said, "I hope your sense of fairness will acquit me of any officiousness or—any lack of sympathy with your own position in this."

"Men talk of 'sympathy,' where they don't even understand, Hamilton. But I certainly do not hold you officious." And he took the proffered hand.

As Hamilton passed out the other followed him to the little narrow, unpainted porch.

"Tell Garnett I want to see *him*," he said.

Hamilton turned to him. "I hope, Roger, that

when you come to interview Garnett, if you won't let me be present—that you'll—let Joe come.”

“Alan—when I come face to face with Henry Garnett, I don't want any man, living or dead, between.”

Speaking of the mercy of God, perhaps the most immediate proof of it lies in the fact of our absolute inability to be weighted down by the burdens of our friends.

Hamilton was more than usually sympathetic, but he was more than usually robust of temperament also; and so it was, that though he entered into the troubles of the people he elected to help—and they were many—he came whole out of them, as a physician who enters where disease prevails, yet comes clean into the open air again.

In Roger Holbrooke's presence, he had felt keenly the silent tragedy of that little home. But in the days that succeeded his interview with his sometime friend, other things crowded in upon him and claimed his interest.

Henry Garnett he had always with him, in a sense, for he had pledged himself to make Garnett's problem his own for solving, in so far as was possible.

But even Garnett's trouble could not cloud, except fleetingly, his days of sunshine. Hamilton was young, vigorous, talented. As Roger Holbrooke had said, he had been sent about his man's work with the strength of a man. Already the tide of health, checked for a space, was sweeping back through his veins. Already his ambition, his hope, to do great

things was beating high again. What mattered the little temporary hurt to his professional reputation now? He could mend that by one brilliant stroke, and he would!

And then—but it was not a matter of “and then” with Hamilton. That added something that had come into his life so filled, so thrilled it, that all other things were rendered only contributory to the one great fact: Down the avenue, yonder among the magnolias, was somebody who rendered everything which touched him but a setting for some phase of her radiant self!

CHAPTER XIV

DOROTHY PERKINS had slipped away—away to where not even the hearts that loved her best could follow.

Only last week she had passed along these lanes, the spirit herald of a hastening summer, and every rod of hedge had kindled at her coming. But now, Dorothy had wrapped the season's rosy dawn about her and slipped away, leaving in the heart of every browned and drooping rose but the ashes of remembered fires.

Phlegmatic people blinked, and looked again. Restless people asked each other how it *could* have happened, and they right there! Pessimists said that roses always die; but the people who kept their hearts and faces toward the East reminded each other that the springtime would come again.

And now there was nothing left for Dorothy's disappointed lovers but to linger wistfully along the ways which she had glorified but yesterday. Here they passed regretfully. There they silenced their noisy autos, and attempted, in a language all too inadequate, to picture to politely unbelieving strangers that miracle of roses.

Alan had stopped his car between long lines of

hedges thus lately bereft, and was trying, in his man's way, to rekindle for the woman beside him their dying glory.

"'Pink'?—You don't mean to tell me you didn't see?—Yes, I suppose you'd call it 'pink'; but it's vivid, glowing, *live*, like a flame beneath a delicate transparency, like—like *you*!" he suddenly exclaimed.

The veiled fire leaped up in the woman's cheeks, but she said in laughing annoyance:

"Your glowing Dorothy Perkins must have friends who are saucily frank with her."

"Maybe," he said, with a low, happy laugh, and then he added: "Dorothy is—elusive. It's a case of now you think you see her, and now you know you don't— Oh—by George!"

"What?"

"I've made a discovery."

"What is it?"

He leaned toward her till he could see under the shading brim of her hat. "I have caught you red-handed in your masquerade!"

She evidently did not like the look he gave her, for she raised her hand quickly and pulled down her hat brim, to obscure it, as he finished with:

"*You* are Dorothy Perkins!"

The brim of her hat still hid her face, but Alan saw her breast rise in a quick intake of breath. Was she laughing?

After a moment she said: "Your friend Dorothy seems to have a trick of slipping away from people

when they don't behave to suit her. You'd better take warning!"

"Oh, but I'd like to see you get away from me, and your car a hopeless ruin a mile up the road!"

"You are always reproaching me for not driving, but you see what comes of it when I do."

"Well, it's a shame the way you stay behind those magnolias! A shame you won't drive with me! You see, if you hadn't turned me down, you'd have known something of this pretty country of ours."

"It is getting late," said the woman, looking away toward the western horizon, "I ought to have made you take me home."

Alan laughed again. "You tried to, but you couldn't."

"Don't make me sorry that you came to my rescue," she warned.

"I won't. I'm going to make you glad. I am going to show you the prettiest spot in Alabama. Then we will take a quick run over to the old darky you are after provisioning, and get back home in plenty of time for you to ask me to dinner."

"I'm afraid we'll be out very late," she said.

Alan ducked for another look under her hat, and recovered just in time to catch a patently reproving bow from Phyllis Howard who flashed past in another car at the critical moment.

The man pressed the starter, and again they were speeding along the level highway. His chauffeur had

been left behind to help the driver of the disabled car, and he was taking Faith, almost by force, on the mission of mercy that had been interrupted by the mishap.

Hamilton willed that no shadow of Henry Garnett should intervene between them to-day, so he did not mention her note nor his visit to Roger Holbrooke. It was unfair to expect a woman to take the same hold on life as a man; and this was one of the things that ought to be settled between men, without its having to be thrust into the delicate machinery of a woman's sensitively ordered life. The woman, too, seemed to shun the topic that had come so near to dividing them; for she made no reference whatever to their last meeting nor to the sequel to it. Both seemed to accept the subject as closed between them, for the time, at least, and both were happier for it.

Conversation was out of the question now, even if they had cared to talk, and little scrappy remarks at scattered intervals sufficed for a long run through the waning afternoon.

"What's that?" asked Alan once as they flashed through a cold streak of air that threaded the warmer atmosphere.

"A floating ghost," his companion answered.

"Pretty good for a Californian!" And the car sped on. "Do you know that scent?" he questioned, as they rose to the crest of a long, low hill, and then dipped toward a valley, all perfume.

"Bay blossoms."

"Right again," he said. "To get away from it in this valley would be as much out of nature as to escape from the goodness of God."

"Don't we—ever?" she asked.

"Do we ever?" Then after a silence the man said abruptly:

"Faith—you are Southern."

"Yes."

"Won't you tell me something about yourself?"

"Would you mind *very* much if I didn't?"

"Why, no—no."

He remembered his decision to advise her at some propitious time, but, somehow, this time didn't seem propitious, and he waited for another.

And now they were gliding down the long incline toward a thicket of silver-tipped trees that had sent their welcome ahead to the hilltops.

"And you have never been this road before?" Hamilton asked, as if the question were an old one between them, but the answer hard to credit. "It's a roundabout way to your colored friend, but right down there is the prettiest spot in the State of Alabama, and you've just *got* to see it!"

Another minute, and she beheld the spot he had more than once tried to describe to her. They were entering a long wooden bridge that spanned a depth so shady, so cool, so green, one knew instinctively that the shadiness, the coolness, the greenness of it would, in the next moment, flow together by some woodland magic into quiet waters.

It was where the waters were born that the old

bridge suddenly changed its mind. So far, it had only dipped into the edge of the swamp—where it could see in and see out, as it were, after the manner of other conservatives. But the waters beckoned! The old bridge suddenly lost its head, and, turning at a decided angle, plunged into the heart of that deep, dank twilight of greenness. No, there couldn't have been another spot just like it, for nowhere else could a frail old bridge have been so tempted, so almost drawn by force, from the straight and narrow path before it. And now, giant smilax laid amorous hold of the old structure, wreathing it as for a holiday and drawing it toward the deep and deeper mysteries of the wild-wood.

Below were the beckoning waters, coming from—God knew where, and creeping, creeping where they listed, with never a soul to dam them, except figuratively and at freshet times. Around, slender silver bay-trees waded knee-deep in the shimmering waters; beyond, dark oaks and darker cypress-trees hung out to meet their own reflection misty shreds of pale-gray moss; while yonder and yonder, where the waters had stopped to rest in little cool green pools of refuge, water-lilies rode at anchor on their mirror surface.

"Are you glad you came, Faith?"

"Can you *ask* it?" she exclaimed as they moved very, very slowly through that prettiest spot in Alabama. And then——

"Don't go yet! Couldn't we get some lilies?" she begged, as the foolish old bridge, pulling itself to-

gether now, showed signs of returning to the conventional.

"Of course we could." And he stopped the car a few rods farther on, where the bridge dipped low toward dry land again, and alighted.

"Oh, it will take the two of us to manage it," he declared, as Faith settled back on the cushions with the air of one who was going to stay there awhile and be very patient. "Come out of there. You've got to help gather them!"

A momentary contest, and then they compromised on his man's way and together plunged into the lush greenness. The descent to the beckoning waters would have been easy enough, if sword-edged palmettos and rapier-pointed Spanish bayonets had not opposed, at every turn, their impious intrusion into that haunt of woodland mysteries.

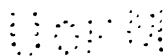
But when a man is willing to take a good many scratches, asking only that the woman in the case come whole out of the adventure, that man is apt to reach his objective. They found the lilies, and went gathering them like boy and girl together. These were white, yes—but just over there they were whiter—and yonder they were more pure and perfect still. Beyond—always beyond! And way out of reach, the very whitest!

"I'll go after them, if you say so," the man declared, as she stood on the edge of a dark pool and looked longingly toward the ideal.

"No," she said a little wistfully, "we can do with these— They are lovely, after all."



"No," she said a little wistfully, "we can do with these— They are lovely, after all"



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And the man was satisfied—even as to-day he was satisfied with this less perfect self of her. If, yesterday, he missed his spirit of inspiration, his angel of all-sympathy, to-day it was enough that she was a woman—a woman with the wine of youth on her scarlet lips, and an invitation in her velvet eyes.

She was standing with her arms full of lilies,—and what more natural than that the man who had been so scratched to get them for her should stand very near now, lifting, to look deep into them, the cool blossom cups, even from where they lay close to a milk-white throat.

Suddenly he turned one of the snowy flower cups directly toward her. “Can you look this in the face and tell it that you don’t love me?—*Faith!* Why, girl! is love such a very terrible thing that you should turn white at the mention of it?—You are dropping your lilies—did you mean to throw them away?” And then, after a pause in which no answer came: “You needn’t turn away from me; I love you, and I’m going to *have* you— Do you hear me?”

“Hush, Alan—*please* hush”—with her white face still averted—“and let go my arms *now!*”

He released the wrists that he had seized almost unconsciously, but protested still:

“Why must I hush?—Why can’t I hold you for my own when you love me, and I *know* it!”

“Because—no, let them drop now—because there is the shadow of another between us.”

All the loneliness of that deep, deep wood was compassed in the silence that followed.

"But you don't mean that you are *bound* to him?" he asked at length. And the voice was not his own.

"Yes."

"*Irrevocably?*"

"Yes."

"God!" but the cry was so low that the woman scarcely heard it.

After a moment she turned to him, and they looked into each other's eyes.

"Let's go back," she said. And they passed heedless over the scattered lilies, and went back along the way that they had come, empty-handed.

The roundabout way to Faith's colored friend proved long enough to take till early dark, and there was a further delay caused by the fact that they found the old darky sick, and had to remain awhile for Doctor Hamilton to help her. It was black night by the time they entered the auto again and turned back toward the little city.

They had not spoken in that half-hour that lay between the bridge and their objective point, because fate had left them nothing else to say. But the brief interview in the old Mammy's cabin had served to break the tension for the woman at least; and now, as they fled back to the inevitable, she seemed to make conscious efforts to break at intervals the long stretch of silence.

"Couldn't we go back by the bridge?" she asked. "I want to see the fireflies that you've been tell-

ing me about. It doesn't matter about the time now."

"Why, yes." Then silence again for a long, dark mile.

"They must be lovely—the fireflies—on a night like this."

"Yes," the man answered.

It was no use. The woman gave up trying, and lay back with her head on the cushions and her face lifted to the sky. It was good to see the stars stand bright and still while below, here, one plunged ahead in the dark.

After a little she spoke again, and straight out of her heart.

"Alan, what is heaven?"

"Heaven?—is—where love and youth come true."

A pair of slim hands were raised quickly to her eyes, and the stars went out.

But the man was looking steadily in front into a long, dark night. After a space, however, the far shadows began to sparkle now and again, and now more vividly, and the man said to her quickly:

"Look, Faith!"

"Oh!"

"But this is just a foretaste. Wait till we get on the bridge."

An impatient spurt ahead, and then a slow dip into the sparkling darkness, and they were on the old bridge again. Fireflies around, above, beneath them; and nothing else visible but the rough plank floor swept by the auto's light in front, and shadow

trees on either hand, silver-tipped where the slant light fell!

No moon hung in the skies, and the stars were far and cold.

Dark and darker were the deep wood places, for Mystery had retaken to herself the haunts that but two hours ago their impious feet had dared to lightly thread.

"And we thought we saw to the end!" It was almost a whisper, for one speaks in lowered voice in the presence of the night.

"The point is, Alan, that you and I know there are white lilies there, even if it is dark."

"For somebody else to gather!"

One drives cautiously over old wooden bridges in the dark. Alan's machine fairly crept over the creaking timbers. It came to a dead halt in the middle of the bridge, and the driver suddenly shut off the lights.

The woman beside him caught her breath in a smothered exclamation, then the two of them sat silent in the deep June dark, surrounded by a thousand thousand fireflies.

Shadows near, and fireflies! Shadows there and yonder, asparkle with floating, swimming points of pale-blue flame! Shadows farther still—and farther—their deep and deeper mysteries pointed now! and now! and now! by pulsing, rhythmic points of fire!

It was one of those moments that fill the universe.

The man suddenly caught her to him in the dark.

"Only love me for this hour," he whispered, "and I can face the rest!"

For one moment of yielding, her arms were about his neck and her hot, tear-wet face was against his own. In the next, she had shrunk away, sobbing like a hurt child, and the man had bowed his head upon the driving-wheel.

Whether the rest of the drive home that night was long or short, neither of them realized; but it was long enough for both to get back some show of courage with which to say a quiet good night to each other when the end came.

CHAPTER XV

THOUGH one carry the universe within him, one must go—if not lightly—at least hardily on his way, that other farers along the journey from Yesterday to To-morrow may not suspect the weight of the burden borne within.

Doctor Hamilton had not rested well the night before—that much the face of the man answered back from his shaving mirror the next morning, and that much he knew it must proclaim to his world when he should open the door which stood between him and it. But he buttoned his coat close across his breast. No other man had ever had so much of spirit disaster— It must be hidden—hidden—lest it set him apart as less than a man!

He was ready now to go down to breakfast. After all, everything was just as it was yesterday, even if the whole universe *were* different! He was ready now to go down—but——

A light knock at his door stopped him for a moment in the act of opening it, to wonder who was there. Then he opened the door.

Maggie's Tommy stood on the threshold, with something supported on his chubby hands that was shrouded all in white.

"Mamma says *she* sent you the raspberries," Tommy's little soft voice was saying—then, as Ham-

ilton began to exclaim at mamma's goodness—"and mamma says *I* brought you the daisies," and Tommy's goodness was immediately celebrated with yet greater enthusiasm.

At that moment, six-year-old Billy appeared from an exploring tour down the boarding-house hall.

"Mamma says you be sure to send her napkin back, Uncle Alan. She says you done lost about a half-dozen of 'em already!" was that imp's greeting to him.

Hamilton immediately disrobed the tray, and handed the covering napkin to Billy. He was exclaiming again at the combination of the good and the beautiful that now lay uncovered to view, and Tommy was drinking in his superlatives with silent, round-eyed joy, when Billy interrupted, pounding Hamilton on the leg by way of emphasizing his news:

"Uncle Alan, Uncle Alan, mamma's done named the baby!"

"You don't say so!" Uncle Alan exclaimed.

"Yes, she is, too," supported Tommy; "she done named him a satin name."

"'Latin' name, Tommy; you ain't got no more sense'n a hog!"

"Humph, boy, a hog got more sense'n you fink he got!"

"Well, shut up quarrelling, and tell me what the kid's name is," broke in Hamilton.

"Er—er—" Tommy was beginning, but Billy swept him aside:

"Name's 'Finis.' Mamma told papa so at breakfast this mornin' an' papa said he'd bet his head—What you laughin' at, Uncle Alan?"

"Oh, nothing." Hamilton took out a pencil and prescription tablet. "Billy," said he, "tell your mother that the baby's name is Latin, all right, but not 'Finis'—it's—this." And he wrote something on a slip which he folded and handed to the boy. "Don't open it," he ordered.

"Give you my word of honor," Billy was beginning, with irresponsible glibness when Hamilton lifted his freckled face till he could look him squarely in the eye.

"Billy," he said, "a gentleman's word is always his 'word of honor.' Here, carry these down-stairs for me; I want to eat them for my breakfast. I'll give Tommy a lift."

As Hamilton gathered up Tommy into his arms for a descent to the breakfast floor, Billy volunteered:

"Uncle Alan, mamma's let Tommy be goin' on five ever sence you was there."

Tommy's eyes shone as he heard the thrilling news conveyed. He put one little plump paw on Hamilton's freshly shaven face, and said, with worshipful admiration:

"Unckn Alan, I weckon mamma'd let *you* be a hunderd!" And as the man hugged the stocky little figure to him, it was, somehow, not so much Tommy as the dream son of his own despairing hope that he gathered to his covered, hidden breast.

Then Hamilton descended the steps with his burden, and Billy followed at heel, laboriously spelling out from a surreptitiously opened paper:

“‘E-t c-e-t-e-r-a.’”

At the moment of parting, Billy suddenly remembered that his mother had entrusted him with a note to Uncle Alan. It was only a few lines to say that Maggie was going to give a garden-party Thursday evening, and that Hamilton must be sure to hold up Moses' hands.

Under the Latin name for Maggie's latest baby, Hamilton wrote that it would be simply impossible—he was very sorry. And he sent the boys faring home.

The little incident helped him, and he went in to breakfast with a face that excited no comment.

If the garden-party had been anywhere but at Maggie's, Hamilton would have abided by his decision to stay away; but to be rung up by that best of chums and told in panic that there were “not enough men to go around” was more than even his masculine selfishness could hold out against. He promptly recanted, and offered to “bring” Phyllis, but he heard, at the end of an enigmatical little laugh, that Phyllis was coming with “that Mr. Bailey.”

When the evening of the party arrived, Hamilton made a stubborn effort to leave the fellow with the heartache at home, and took, as he thought, his conventional self to Maggie's garden-party to help go around. He had meant to be early, but a pro-

fessional call delayed him, so when he did arrive on the scene, the garden-party was in full swing.

Hamilton found his hostess on the brilliantly lighted terrace, surrounded by a bevy of guests whose lively comments and rippling laughter suggested a meaty theme of discussion.

"The nurses at Saint Joseph's——"

"Sh-h—here he comes now!" he caught as he appeared, and——

"Now say what you said about him!" as he approached.

To his slight discomfiture the group divided as he came up, and made him its centre.

"Such luck!" It was Maggie this time. "Here I've been moving heaven and earth to get talked about, and *you*"—to Alan—"achieve it without lifting a hand!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Hamilton. But two or three women began talking and laughing at the same time, and the group paid no more attention to his question than if he had spoken from Panama.

"She knows the value of mystery," Hamilton caught above the babel.

"She's a widow."

"No, she's not. Widows always repaint their houses the first thing."

"But the house isn't hers!"

In a moment or two, however, Maggie got the floor again—people listened to Maggie:

"Here I've been riding all over this county with

Alan Hamilton, alone and unprotected, and all the comment I've managed to excite was 'Mag's looking for cooking butter,' but——"

"One trouble with you," broke in Alan at an opportune lull, "is that impregnable name of yours. It's manifestly impossible for a 'Maggie' to be 'dangerous.' Now, a 'Margaret' might manage it, though even that would be up-hill business; but you take my word for it, if you let people call you 'Maggie' or 'Mag,' they'll never distrust you while the world stands."

"And what is the name of our lady of mystery?" Mrs. Lupton asked. "Not 'Margaret' or 'Maggie' or 'Mag'—?" Her voice was left on just the key to suggest the added "evidently" which she was careful not to put into language.

Hamilton's sallow face bronzed quickly, and his eyes flashed.

"Laugh it off," whispered Maggie promptly.

He tried, but he did not make a flattering success of it.

Maggie returned to the charge. Possibly she felt that as Hamilton had to be bantered, he would take it more gracefully from herself.

"Phyllis Howard has caught up with you, Alan. She says you were driving with the lady of mystery day before yesterday—and—must I tell him?" with a laughing glance around toward the amused listeners, but with a "keep cool" warning in her eyes as she looked back into his own.

"—Saw you kiss her," put in a keen-eyed, dissipated-looking woman.

"No," said Hamilton promptly but evenly, "Miss Howard is mistaken."

"She didn't say she saw him kiss her—" began Maggie quickly, but the keen-eyed woman interrupted again:

"No, what she really said was that if she didn't see you kiss her, she certainly caught you trying."

"Miss Howard is mistaken there, too," he replied.

"Keep your poise," warned Maggie under her breath.

"'Gin a body kiss a body'— Lord, don't look so black, Hamilton!" It was Sam Bailey's raucous voice that was left speaking. "Didn't mean a thing in the world, I assure you. Didn't know you were—so—serious."

"There's a lady in question," said Hamilton to Bailey, but in a quiet undertone.

But another, and one of those whom a man may not call to account, was already speaking:

"Mrs. Lupton here," the free lance was saying, "says she 'accidentally' sees you going over there all the time."

"I didn't know that I had called on Mrs. Godwin so often." And Hamilton looked into Mrs. Lupton's eyes rather steadily.

But the lady was ready for him:

"Oh, I don't suppose it does seem 'often' to you, doctor, dear—and that's the sweet part of it," she said.

"Alan," it was Maggie this time, and her hand was on his arm, "I promised Mary Simpson to introduce you to her guest from Nashville as soon as

you should get here. Come on, we can't spend all our time joking with old-time confederates." But when she had steered him well away from the gossiping group, she said sharply:

"Why in the world didn't you carry it off as a joke? Don't you know that's always the safest way out?"

"But a lady shouldn't be made the subject of a joke."

"Oh—I wasn't thinking of *her*."

"I was."

"What is the real truth about it, Alan?" They had drawn a little apart and had taken seats in a vine-curtained alcove. Maggie's face had grown serious.

"Mrs. Godwin's car ran down an embankment with her the other day," Alan answered, "and I happened along in time to be of service. She was unhurt, in spite of the fact that she had been thrown out, so I took her on her interrupted mission. Phyllis passed us as I was leaning toward Mrs. Godwin in talking, and put her own construction on what she saw.

"Thrown out," mused Maggie. "What a pity it couldn't have been Phyllis!"

"Why?"

Maggie laughed. "Phyl has been dressing to get upset nearly ever since autos were invented," she confided to him, "and she's never been in an accident yet. Phyllis is unlucky, like me."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Maggie!"

"Well, you ought to be ashamed of speaking impatiently of Phyllis to those people. She only told that as a joke on you, and you know it. You've got to find her directly, and be nice to her."

"Maggie," said the young man thoughtfully, "it's a pity you had to be a woman."

"Why?"

"You would have made such a fine bulldog."

"I suppose you mean my tenacity of purpose—but some day you'll find out I'm right about Phyllis."

He changed the subject. "How did you come to invite Mrs. Lupton, when she left you out?"

"Business reasons. And her party was just a little one, you know.—Besides, I got even."

"Well, tell me how Sam Bailey broke in here."

"Phyllis asked me to invite him— You went driving with the lady of mystery, you'll remember."

"That's just my luck!" from Hamilton.

"Oh, you *do* mind?" And Maggie's face lighted.

"Mind'?— It's that—Bailey! It has been the dream of my life to get good and even with him, and now I see the chance slipping away from me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Phyllis will marry Bailey for his money, and then for her sake I'll have to forego the satisfaction of wringing his neck."

"Oh, Alan, I know so well how you feel! Now I'm *living* to see the devil get Henry Garnett, but it's just my luck for him to repent at the last minute and go to heaven!"

Hamilton opened his lips, but Maggie was already saying:

"But if you only had sense enough, Alan, you could get a good deal more than even with Mr. Bailey."

"You have a hard time with me, don't you, girl?"

"And I'm afraid I have a harder just ahead."

"Why?"

"I can't turn you loose, and yet I know I'll only make you mad if I say what I've got to."

"What——?"

Maggie's husband put his head in between the vine curtains at this juncture.

"Well, upon my word, you two look cozy!" he exclaimed, delighted. "No, no, Mag, I don't need you a bit—rest your bones while you've got the chance." And he disappeared.

Hamilton and his companion laughed, and he finished his interrupted question:

"What do you want to say to me? Surely you can't hesitate, since it is you and I."

"A word to the *unwise*, dear, about the lady of mystery."

"Well?"

"I'd be careful, if I were you, about being so much with her."

"For her sake?"

"No, for your own."

"Why, you don't suppose I care anything for their idle gossip, except for her!"

"It's not that, Alan, it's her influence on you that I'm troubled about."

"Don't be absurd, Maggie."

"I won't!—you are right at the point where you are ripe to get tangled up with her——"

"Maggie!" he interrupted, with asperity.

"Oh, I knew you wouldn't let me say anything to you! I knew you'd get mad!"

"I'm not mad. Go ahead and say what you started to."

Maggie looked into his indignant eyes, but went straight to her objective:

"In the first place," she began, "she shuns people in a way that is hardly sane, unless there is some hidden reason for her doing so, and hidden reasons are always suspicious." She paused for the expected interruption, but, none being forthcoming, she resumed: "Nobody knows anything about her or can find out anything. She poses as a widow and doesn't dress like one. In spite of the fact that she can't be a day over twenty-seven, and is a good deal better-looking than is commonly good for a woman, she comes all the way across the continent and sets up housekeeping without sign of a companion or chaperone or reason why."

"You women never give each other the benefit of a doubt, do you?"

"Oh, there it is again! But if we women didn't hold each other to account, I'd like to know what would become of standards. Now, you, for instance, you've been a gentleman for generations in

the best that the term means, but you've been a *man* for so many more that even you can't be trusted to keep your head where a woman is concerned."

"You are usually lucid, Maggie, but——"

"Oh, you know what I mean! I mean that you owe it to yourself to keep away from a woman who is *that* fascinating unless you *know* she is all right.—Alan, I wouldn't talk to you this way if I didn't love you."

"I do know that she is all right, Maggie."

"Has she told you about herself?—And have you only her word?"

"Neither—I know the woman."

"*You don't know anything about her?*"

"I know *her*—that's all that is necessary."

"Alan!" Maggie put a firm hand on his shoulder, "promise me one thing—just one—will you?"

"What?"

"That you won't make love to her till you find out something about her."

"I've already done it."

"Oh!" and to the young man's astonished distress, Maggie brushed away a swift fall of tears.

"Why, Maggie, dear," he exclaimed with concern, "don't!—she has refused me."

Maggie cleared her throat. "I might have known," she said huskily, "that you'd go head-long to it! But you wouldn't have listened if I had spoken before!"

"No, I wouldn't have listened."

"You are not going back there?" she questioned anxiously.

"If she'll let me, yes. Why shouldn't I have her friendship?"

"How many times have you made love to her?"

"That once."

"Oh, goodness! Of *course* she refused you the first time! And, of course, you'll propose again as soon as you get half a chance. She'll take you next pop!" A little shining drop on Maggie's breast changed the intended tone of the young man's answer.

"You do her an injustice, dear. She has repulsed me at every step, and now she has spoken, finally. I shall never again speak of love to her— Are you happy, little partner?"

"Not in your unhappiness, Alan—not that!"

"Maggie, will you do something for me?"

"Yes, dear, of course."

"Help silence this gossip about *her*."

"I will."

In the process of "going around" that evening, Hamilton was entrapped, to his inward indignation, into a heart-to-heart talk with Phyllis Howard. It had been all right for Maggie to take a battering-ram to the wall of reserve with which he habitually surrounded himself, but he inwardly resented any attack on it from Phyllis. So it was with ill-concealed impatience he heard from her that Mr. Bailey had said his brother was so surprised the other day

at being made president of the medical association—so distressed—because he, himself, was supporting Hamilton for re-election—Hamilton was a nice fellow, and *very* talented. And his impatience was nearer expression still when Phyllis begged, for old friendship's sake—they had always advised each other—to be allowed to warn him against his growing friendship for that Garnett man—Mr. Bailey had been so surprised, so distressed at it—of course it was all in confidence—Mr. Bailey knew that she, Phyllis, had been like a sister to Alan, and might be able to influence him.

Hamilton started to express himself on the subject of the Baileys, but he suddenly remembered that Phyllis had asked Maggie to invite one of them to her party, so he withheld his intended remark.

"Thank you, Phyllis," he said, instead, "for your interest in me, but—a man has to use his own judgment, you know."

After the garden-party was over, the usual chosen few remained to say the final intimate things a hostess so loves to hear. "Such a pretty party, Maggie, dear," "I never saw such lovely flowers," "Your dress is too sweet for anything!"—but Hamilton found a chance between the feminine interjections to slip in the question:

"Maggie, what on earth did you do to the boys?"

"Sent them ten miles in the country, and they haven't yet had time to walk back," laughed the interrogated.

"Well, where's the noblest Roman of them all?"

"I—I'll box your ears for you, some day, Alan!"

The chosen few drifted into seats in a cozy circle. They were, with one exception, old associates, and there was always much to be talked out between them. The exception, a Mr. Bailey, remained by grace of being escort to one of the chosen.

Hamilton had just said to Maggie's husband, in what he intended to be an aside, that he had dropped in to see Roger Holbrooke several days before, and was distressed to see how bitter, how unlike himself, Holbrooke had grown.

An unexpected quiet made the remark, in effect, general; and as most of those present knew either the Holbrookes or their history, the interest became general, too. It was a woman who replied:

"What a pity Roger didn't rise superior to his reverses!"

"Genius of a certain sort can force destiny"—it was the quiet, slow voice of Maggie's husband speaking—"but the majority of us are controlled in a big measure by circumstances."

"And therein lie our tragedies," said Hamilton.

"But life is for character-building, isn't it?" a richly dressed woman submitted.

"And the uses of adversity are sweet?" propounded another bedecked one.

But Maggie put in:

"Oh, of course, one *could* go to heaven from Martin Turner's plane of life, but the question is, who would care to?"

"I have seen more men marred than made by adversity," added a hitherto silent man.

"And we assume a good deal when we say that life is not intended to be lived for its own sake, too," added Hamilton again.

"Roger Holbrooke got what he deserved for marrying that common woman; he ought to have held himself up and aimed high," averred Mr. Bailey. The dead silence that greeted the remark was understood by all except Mr. Bailey. He blundered on: "And he never would have done it, if it hadn't been for the thieving of Henry Garnett— Oh—I beg your pardon, Hamilton—forgot Garnett was—a—friend of yours."

"I am Henry Garnett's friend." The reply came promptly, steadily. Several of the group exchanged glances, and Maggie bit her lip.

"I am a friend of Garnett's, too." Maggie's husband put in, as promptly; but, somehow, the statement didn't help Hamilton's position any, for the footing of Tom Thornton's friendship for the man anathematized had become an open secret. Glance avoided glance now, and Maggie crimsoned.

Hamilton was the very last of the chosen few to bid good-by that night, and as he stood on the steps at parting, his host said, in an aside too low for the ears of his wife:

"Are you finding out anything about Jim Ware's daughter?"

"I'm—afraid I am," answered Hamilton, in a lower tone still. Then he said the expected things to Maggie, and strode down the long front walk.

"How would Mary Simpson's guest do for him?" asked Tom of his wife as Hamilton's tall figure receded.

"Alan wants a woman, not a child," she replied promptly.

"Do you know, Mag"—her husband was looking her over speculatively as he spoke—"I have always wondered why Hamilton didn't fall in love with *you*."

"*Thank you!*—Alan needs a woman who would appeal to his imagination, honey."

"He's a fine fellow."

"Such a fine one!"

"Not easy to fathom, though."

"No-o—Tom—has Alan been gambling?"

"Not that I know."

"*Has* he been drinking lately with Henry Garnett?"

"Why, Mag, that's all talk, I think, but it's bad for Hamilton. The men are saying he's lost his nerve—that's worse, you know. That jackleg Bailey seems to be the dynamic force behind the rumor, but Hamilton hasn't been able to trace it certainly to him."

"The women are saying," said Maggie, "that this girl or woman up here at the Fletchers' is a married woman, and that Alan is in love with her." Maggie never betrayed a confidence.

"And who is behind that?" he asked.

"The nurses at Saint Joseph's, principally. Miss Birch told me that Sister Anastasia got very restless

about their constant companionship at the hospital, though of course she never said so."

"Lord, Mag, what would a sister of charity know about things like that?"

"Honey, they know enough to hang some of us! For all her sweet, aloof saintliness; Sister Anastasia's middle name is 'Worldly-Wisdom.'"

"Well, it's all bad for Hamilton."

"Alan has always been so fearlessly upright," Maggie said after a moment.

"Yet I've often wondered——"

"What?" she challenged quickly.

"Why, Hamilton's way has been made so smooth for him—he's never been tested, you know—I have often wondered if he would prove strong in a moral crisis."

When Hamilton reached his rooms that night, he found, among the evening mail which had been only carelessly glanced at, a letter which he himself had addressed to Henry Garnett at Biloxi, but which had been returned because no such person had been found at that place.

CHAPTER XVI

AND then, one night, Henry Garnett came to Hamilton again, during his hours of study in his office in the Hawley.

There was no need for Alan to ask him how he felt, for his two eyes told him, all too surely, that the man had taken a long step nearer the grave. Instead, the host said pleasantly, as he placed a chair for his visitor:

"How are things at—the Gulf?"

"About as usual, I suppose." Garnett still wore the dark glasses, and he did not remove them, though Hamilton's study light was heavily shaded.

"You changed your mind and went to the Pass?" said the host, with his mind on his returned letter.

"No," replied the other.

"Why, I wrote to you at Biloxi, and the letter was returned to me!"

"I didn't go to the coast," answered the man with the shaded eyes; and then he changed the subject:

"Has Starnes communicated with you yet?—I told him to if he got another clue. I looked him up as soon as I got in, but he was out of town."

"Why—yes—I've heard from him," Hamilton hesitated.

"What luck?"

"Discouraging."

"Just what did he say to you?"

"I'm afraid you have a disappointment ahead of you, Henry."

"Tell me."

"Starnes found that the Ware girl has recently been on the vaudeville stage. She was singing and dancing in a picture show in Atlanta last winter. He has not yet found out where she has been since, but he thinks he can. She seems to have contracted the alias habit," answered Hamilton.

"Do you think the circumstances—necessarily discouraging?"

"Oh, no. She may not really have gone to the bad. She is only eighteen, you say?"

"Yes—and Jim, her father, you know, was not the sort to go to pieces," replied Garnett.

"I told Starnes to bend every effort."

"Yes. We must go all the way. But Jim's daughter—Jim's daughter will be all right. I am not afraid." He seemed to be trying to reassure himself.

"If that is true, we can work wonders—you and I together, Henry."

"Yes."

Hamilton changed the subject. "About that mortgage on Thornton's place, Henry—I have decided that it won't be quite fair to Maggie to take it as you suggested; but if you'll let me buy it from you, I'll give it to the little boys."

"I didn't want to involve you," the other began, when Hamilton interrupted:

"That's perfectly all right—I'd like to do something for Maggie's boys."

"Very well," agreed the older man.

There was a period of silence between them which the host started once or twice to break, but without pushing the determination. At length, however, he turned squarely to the man before him.

"Henry," he said, "may I give you a piece of advice?"

"Certainly."

"Shut up the Empire. Shut up everything connected with it."

"Why, *no*!"

"If I wanted to correct mistakes, I'd begin there."

"I am not responsible for other men's free acts. I have told you that I am not a religionist, Hamilton."

The tone of the answer precluded further pressing of the point, and Hamilton relapsed into silence.

After a space, in which he came to the conclusion that the doomed man needed the little of inspiration it was his to give, even more sadly than he had at first thought, Hamilton said gently:

"I went to see Roger Holbrooke the other day."

The other looked up and said: "Yes?"

"And told him of your determination."

"I *am* responsible there."

Leaving out Holbrooke's bitter demand for a personal conference, and all reference to the grim

tragedy of the wife and children, Hamilton related the interview.

"You see he claims the Empire site with interest on the original worth of it," he finished.

"He'll not get it."

"You made it more valuable through shifting the centre of business that way by your other deals, Warren says."

"Yes, and the money I spent on improving the vicinity was my own. Only that half block was left of the Holbrooke estate. Everything else of theirs had gone to family debts." He waited a moment, and then continued: "I intend to give to the Holbrookes an amount equal to the value of the Empire site at their father's death—when I can determine what that is—and simple interest on the sum from that time to this. That is fair. It is more than they would have had if I had not used it, for the Holbrookes are notoriously bad business men."

"You have not asked me for my opinion, Henry, but may I give it to you?"

"Why, certainly."

"I think Holbrooke's position in this is nearer right than your own."

"I don't."

"Well—I'm going to express myself one time, anyhow. It seems to me that the only thing involved here is a little stubbornness of opinion. I'd try to yield that, if I were in your place."

But the hard face only grew the harder, the cold voice, colder, as the man said grimly:

"I'll see Holbrooke myself." He leaned forward suddenly, grasping his left side.

"Lie down," said Hamilton. "This is a Morris chair."

"No—I'm all right—it's to be expect—ed." And after the spasm had passed: "*I'll*—see Roger Holbrooke."

Hamilton had quickly poured something into a glass, and now handed it to him.

"Take it," he said. When the other had obeyed, he continued: "Would you mind letting me deal with Roger?"

"It's unfair to you, since you——"

"Not at all. I want to."

"If—I were myself, you know——"

"As your physician, I'm going to dictate to you. This matter must be left to me."

"I'll think about it."

"—You feel better?"

"Yes, I'm better. All right—Thank you."

And they sat silent again.

For weeks now, Hamilton had carried about with him a slowly forming determination to talk to Garnett about his old mother as soon as he should get the opportunity; but as he sat now before the slowly dying man and gazed into his inscrutable countenance, he held his peace. Another time—another time would be better!

It was Henry Garnett who broke the silence:

"I've got to take another business trip, Alan. I'll be gone some time."

Hamilton noted the use of the word "another," but he only said:

"You are not able to, Henry. You simply *must* leave business to me and Warren, or let it slide."

"I must attend to this. A change may be good for me."

"Oh, a change is all right. Fact is, you'll *have* to get out of this heat. But I want you to go to the seashore and relax."

"When I arrange this matter, I'll do whatever you say."

And so it was ultimately settled, in spite of the fact that Hamilton protested to the last.

"I'll leave with Pierce Warren the money for Holbrooke," Garnett added, like a man who expected to be gone a long time, "but it will probably be better for you to handle the matter of settlement. I have stated to you my offer to Holbrooke. Tell him he can take it, or leave it.—But—find Jim's daughter. Starnes will be instructed to confer with you."

"How long will you be gone?" Hamilton asked, surprised at the far-reaching arrangements.

"I can't possibly say— Do you mind the charge?"

"Certainly not. I was thinking of you."

"Oh, I'm all right—perfect—" But he dropped back as he attempted to rise, and his skull-like face became spotted. Hamilton lowered the Morris chair this time, and stood beside him for some minutes. Neither man spoke while the paroxysm lasted. When the mottled color of the sick man's face

had dissolved, leaving it corpse white, Hamilton sat down beside him, and laid a firm hand on his arm.

"Henry," he said, "listen to me. If there is something too important to be left undone, it's your duty to speak to me or to Warren about it. Your very efforts may defeat you. Do you understand—my friend?"

"—Yes," said the other slowly, "yes—I understand."

"Then shall it be to Warren or to myself? I want to help you—I hope you know that."

"Why, to you, of course, Hamilton. I trust—you."

Hamilton changed his seat to where it would be natural to look away.

"It's the inevitable woman in the case—my wife—" Garnett's voice was saying now; "I must find her—I can't go till I do."

"I didn't know that you had married." Hamilton's remark was painfully short of filling the long wait between.

"Yes—my unpardonable sin, Alan." There was another pause, and one which Hamilton did not attempt to fill, then the deep voice began again:

"It was in Mexico. I was fleeing from myself, and she had been left there alone on the sudden and mysterious death of her father. He had gone there to live, several years before, looking after some mining interests, and had won the ill will of the natives— Well, it was a wild situation, and a time of tense feeling against American land-grabbers. I

protected the girl—from all but myself— No, not that,” as Hamilton looked at him quickly, “not *that*! I won her gratitude—her love, I thought—and married her. I did not tell her what I was. I was a fool—I thought I would be different—I seemed different to myself when she was with me—I— Oh, well, she found me out through some Southerners she met on a trip to Santa Fé.”

“Left you?” asked Alan, when the pause had dragged itself out unbearably.

“Disappeared from the face of my earth. She never came back from Santa Fé.”

“How did she get the money?”

“Her father had placed a large sum to her account in a bank at Santa Fé. She drew it all out, and left no record with the bank of her whereabouts.”

“How *could* she desert you without giving you a hearing!” The younger man’s tone spoke his indignation.

“Why, she was not to blame, Alan. She was a girl, years younger than myself—just a winning, radiant child! She was frightened—besides the other. She had told me once that, down in the bottom of her heart, she was terribly afraid of me.”

“You want to insure that she gets your property?” Alan purposely spoke of business, for his trained eyes, called fleetingly from their merciful withdrawal by a new note in the deep voice, caught the other’s strain.

“I want—*her*!” One long, thin hand went up

before the shading glasses. After a little, the deep voice, strangely quiet now, said: "If you had ever loved a woman, Alan—you'd understand."

"I *do*!"

"—It's—it's like that!"

"She ought to be with you now!" the younger man was saying, but with his face averted again.

"I thought that if she knew—how—how it is with me—that— Well, I'm leaving for San Antonio in a few days. From something I heard, I think she must be there."

"But, Henry, you can't *make* that trip!" It was his physician speaking: "Why not put Starnes onto the clue, and send him?"

"I—I've had better detectives than Starnes at work a long time. It is they who think she is in San Antonio."

"But suppose—suppose you should not get there?"

"I'll leave for you, Alan, a package of papers—some letters from the detectives, and photographs of her—and other things. If I don't get to San Antonio—find her. Advertise for her. What I leave—that is mine—will go to her."

And so it was settled between them.

Hamilton suddenly determined to speak now about the matter he had been deferring.

"Henry," he said, "don't you want to see your mother?"

When Garnett did reply at last, he said simply:

"It's better for her, Alan, as it is."

"But she wants you so!"

"Women with dead sons are always that way, they say."

And though Hamilton felt that he had put his hand on a chord that lay deep within the man, he knew well that it was not his mother whom Henry Garnett needed.—The tendency of big sons to out-grow their little mothers he had noted with pain before.

"Don't you think you ought to—?" he was beginning, when the other interrupted:

"The one thing that I can do for her, Alan, is to leave her in peace.—Let's—let it go at that."

The interview had come to its logical close.

As the two men rose to leave, the telephone bell rang, long and persistently.

"I must see you, Alan, to-night," was the message it transmitted. Hamilton did not have to ask whose was the necessity.

"Why, yes," he said at once. "Is there anything the matter—anything serious?"

"—No—I suppose not," the wires brought him, "just something unexpected— Can you come soon?"

"Right this minute— Yes?— No, it's only nine-thirty— Good-by, I'm coming *now*!"

Hamilton put down the phone, and looked up to find the big, dark glasses fixed on him intently. A cold wind out of the north might have so chilled him. The red blood that had surged up to his temples at the first sound of the voice from the re-

ceiver receded quickly, the excited eagerness of his manner suddenly dropped away.

"If—you are ready, Henry, I'll turn this out." And with the turning of an electric button darkness reigned between.

Then Henry Garnett opened the door and let in the light from beyond.

"I always use the second switch," he said as they passed out.

"Yes, so do I—I wasn't thinking."

Arrived at the sidewalk, Garnett insisted on calling a taxi, but Hamilton overruled him.

"Get right in my car here; it's no emergency call, I tell you. I'm going to take you home."

And he did. He saw the sick man safe in the hands of his valet, and gave directions regarding him, before taking his leave.

When Hamilton closed Garnett's door behind him, the red blood surged back into his face—the excited eagerness burned up again, till it kindled the whole man.

He had not seen her since their long ride together through the deep June dark. Until to-night, he had not heard the sound of her voice since their passionate renunciation. She herself had willed that it be so, and his judgment, startled to attention by the laughing gossip at Maggie's garden-party, had later consented to the wisdom of her choice.

But now, he was going to her!

CHAPTER XVII

AND when he did go—when he waited for her again in that long, cool room, as he had waited on happier evenings—Hamilton told the man within him that he was strong enough to carry off this interview on the high plane on which they had parted. But when Faith came in—when they stood once more, face to face, with hand clasped in hand—it took all that that man had of fortitude, of a saving sense of honor, to remember. As it was, Hamilton dropped her hands after one long, passionate look into her eyes, and walked to the mantelpiece.

When she had slipped into a seat, he took the chair on the opposite side of the little table from her, and waited for her to speak.

The woman, who had herself better in hand, answered his questioning glance:

“I’ve got to go, Alan.”

“No—oh, no!” the protest escaped him like a cry.

“Yes—I must,” and then, when he did not speak: “Don’t you see that I must?” There was another pause, which she finally broke: “We couldn’t keep on this way—you—I couldn’t—oh, what’s the use—we both of us understand!”

“When are you going?” he asked, some little time after she had broken off.

"As soon as I can get ready—in a few days."

"Are you going back to California?"

"—I suppose so."

"Couldn't you—*couldn't* you stay here?"

"No."

The locusts outside had the night to themselves for a space, and then the woman's voice was saying:

"I sent for you to-night to ask you to make me a promise—will you?"

He looked up from the interlocked fingers he had been studying. "How can I say?" he answered.

"I thought—that if you realized it was the last time—we would be together—you would."

The man dropped his face in his hands, but as quickly raised it again, as despising his own weakness.

"What do you want, Faith?" he asked huskily.

"I want you to give up all association with Henry Garnett."

"But a woman hasn't the right—" he was beginning, when she interrupted:

"It is *I* who ask it."

"But there are some things that a man may not yield," he said, "some things that not even the woman he loves has the right to ask of him."

"But he is injuring you, Alan! He is injuring you at every turn."

"Faith, you are taking too much to heart, attaching too much import to the little bits of gossip that are floating around. *Can't* I make you understand that?"

"I understand the value of that gossip better than you do. But—Alan—I, somehow, have the horrible fear that the man is hurting *you*!"

"You haven't much faith in me, have you?"

"I have none in Henry Garnett."

Hamilton turned to her with almost impatience. "Faith," he said, "your fear for my connection with Garnett amounts almost to superstition—why, it hardly seems to belong now in these days of humdrum, prosaic virtue—your nerves are not right yet, girl. Try to pull yourself together and realize that this is largely physical with you. That was a serious breakdown you had when you first came. Don't let the last, lingering results of it make you imagine danger where none exists. Summon your common sense to the rescue."

If Hamilton looked to see her face clear, he was disappointed, for the woman only seemed the more restless.

"Oh, I'm not sick, Alan—I'm *not* sick! And if either of us is imaginative—'superstitious'—I should think the one who lets Henry Garnett come before——"

"Faith, can you imagine dying alone without a saving hope for the future or memory of the past?"

"Whose fault is it?"

"What does that matter beside the fact?"

"But it's his fault—his——"

"Not all his."

"Alan——!"

"There was a time when he could have been saved—there was one who could have saved him!"

"*Alan!*"

At last the soul of her was stirred! Hamilton saw her wide eyes turn dark, and the shadows under them deepen as her color fled away. Here at last was the woman that he had willed her to be—a woman whose sympathy was as deep as a poor devil's need!

He leaned toward her and took into an infinitely tender clasp her cold hands.

"Faith," he said, "out yonder on the old bridge the other night, you and I won an understanding big enough to measure—heartbreak! What if I told you, my soul—what if I told you that the woman who could have saved Henry Garnett through his love for her deserted him—flung his spirit back upon itself just as it was struggling upward?"

"*Dear God!*" And she covered her face with the hands that she suddenly wrung from his clasp.

"You understand now—you and I have paid the price of understanding!"—his low voice was saying, when the woman sobbed out:

"*No!* It's not fair! A woman's life is hers to live just as a man's is. She—she ought not to have stayed with him another hour."

"You, a woman! and not to feel that she ought to have struggled—?" he was beginning, when, flinging off her hot tears, she interrupted:

"Don't you believe that a woman's life is hers to live to the fullest?"—Her eyes were starlike with

excitement, and her vivid color had burned up again almost to the surface—"Don't you believe that a woman has the right to live life?—to *live* it?"

"Faith!" The man caught both her wrists across the table which divided them—"If you and I did believe that— Forgive me!" The color of shame swept up to his temples, as he drew back. After a little, he said, in a guarded voice:

"Life is so small a part— Yes, I believe that everything ought to be sacrificed for the soul of a man."

"But what about the soul of the sacrifice?"—quickly.

Hamilton started. "Why—I was speaking generally—I think."

"I was not."

"You don't know the timber of the Garnett race," he answered.

"And *you* don't know the timber of the proposed sacrifice!"

"But"—the man was regarding her now with a deeply troubled expression in which bewilderment overshadowed a keen disappointment—"but the wife's Christian duty, Faith?"

To his deep concern, the woman's hot temper suddenly flamed up. "I'd rather be a Moslem," she flashed, but with a sobbing catch in her voice, "I'd rather be a Moslem and not *have* any soul, than to have been given one that is not my own!"

Hamilton had not the art to conceal his deep worry. "I was speaking of Henry Garnett's wife,"

he said. "Of course there are times when a woman is obliged to break the bonds which bind her—I'm not talking about cases like that. In this instance—in Garnett's case—the wife left without a word—without making one effort to——"

But the woman interrupted him feverishly:

"If she knew him to be wicked, Alan?—What if she *knew* him to be wicked?"

"Faith," and he leaned toward her in an effort to look deeper into her eyes, "Faith, a woman who could desert a man *without giving him a chance* is incapable of entering deeply enough into his soul to know whether he is good or bad!"

"I will not!—I will *not*!——"

Hamilton straightened suddenly.

"—believe it!" the woman ended. She rose abruptly and, crossing to a window, stood with her back to Hamilton.

"You won't believe—what?" He, too, had risen, and he now stood regarding her intently.

"I won't believe"—she suddenly faced him again, but she had retreated against the window draperies, and now stood holding to them with both hands—"I won't believe that a woman ought to be sacrificed!—You—you men are all alike!"—excitedly—"To save your souls you can't get over the idea that woman was created as an after-thought and for your especial benefit! Not one of you but believes it is the woman's natural function to be sacrificed——"

Hamilton raised his hand, and the woman stopped short as if in sudden fear:

"Not a woman's natural function, Faith, but her divine privilege—I am speaking for one man now. Only a woman is capable of supreme sacrifice, and only a woman can snatch from self-immolation her own highest good. Then, the thing to be sacrificed must be acceptable—must be consecrated, pure—*Faith!*"

She had put one white arm across her eyes and turned quickly away. Hamilton stood for some moments looking at her in silence. Then he went over to her, and gently put his hands on her arms.

"I was thinking of Henry Garnett's wife, Faith. I am not arraigning you—forgive me, if I have seemed to! I am going to believe that from your own disaster you saved—all that you could.—Do I not know you, my soul?"

But Hamilton was not to have her answer, for as he stood in mute appeal, hoping, believing that she would speak to him of herself, something came between, that robbed the moment of its imperative demand for confidence.

They were standing beside a long window which opened out on the side veranda, but the casement had swung to.

All suddenly—and without warning—something dull and heavy struck the screen door just beyond. If some one had stumbled and fallen partly against it, it might have sounded like that.

Faith's smothered cry drew Hamilton's instant attention to her.

"Why, you are not scared—the *idea!*" he exclaimed, as she fell back against the draperies, white as the dress she wore. He lost no time in throwing open the casement and the screen door, but as he was about to step out on the dark veranda, the woman, who was now pressed against the wall, suddenly cried out:

"Don't, Alan—*don't!*"

"Why, you little goose!" and he stepped out into the night. The dense magnolias that sheltered the veranda here cut off effectually every ray from the street lights and from the gayly bright terrace of the Luptons' just across in front. The neighbors on the near side had already shut up their house and flown before the advance of the summer heat. It was almost black dark.

As Alan struck a match to look about him, he thought he heard "Don't!" again, in a frightened, distant cry from within; however, he struck another, and started down the side steps to examine the heavy shrubbery. But a voice from beyond, stopped him to hear.

"Doctor Hamilton—it's Yetta," came from the lawn beyond. "Have you lost anything?" With the flickering out of the match that he held between his fingers Hamilton now descried the dim outlines of the maid's slim form as she approached. "Can I help you hunt?" she asked.

"Why, I was looking for possible trespassers," said Hamilton. "A noise against the screen door there frightened Mrs. Godwin— How long have you been

out here?" he asked, trying to see her face in the dark.

"Five or ten minutes," she answered promptly—"Eli left the hose out——"

"Did you hear a noise on the porch here?"

"Oh—that must have been Shep! He and the Luptons' dog were playing up there a minute or two ago—here he is now, the rascal!"

"Well, you are a pretty fellow to be making all this trouble!" Hamilton exclaimed, purposely loudly, as a big shepherd dog came panting up the side steps. "Come in here and make your apologies. And you," he said, in suppressed warning, "my advice to you is to let Eli attend to his own business, and you attend to *yours*. Do you understand me?"

Not a breath in answer came from the still, shadowy figure.

Hamilton turned from her, and drove the panting collie in before him. "I've caught your booger, Faith, and have brought him bodily to you," he said.

"But you were *talking* to somebody!"

"To Yetta—didn't you hear?"

"No, I got away—I was afraid."

"You don't mean to tell me you didn't even come to the window?"

"Of course I didn't!"

"But suppose it *had* been a booger—and suppose he had run off with me!"

"He'd have had to take you, Alan!—What was Yetta doing out there?"

"Winding up the hose Eli left out. She said Shep and the Luptons' dog were playing on the veranda."

"*Oh!*" And a faint color flowed back into her blanched face as she slipped down on an ottoman and took the collie's big head in her arms.

"You are as mean as a dog, Shep!" Then, suddenly, she was sobbing nervously on the creature's shaggy neck.

Hamilton sat down beside her. "Little woman," he said tenderly, "Upson didn't finish up my job well. Your nerves are all to pieces still. It isn't normal for even a woman to be as scary as you are. —Don't cry—don't cry! Why, there's nothing in our world here that would harm you! You couldn't get up an excitement in this town, if you tried. The place is full of darkies, of course, but they are a good-natured, harmless lot. They may make love to some of your pretty clothes or help themselves to your edibles, but they won't hurt you— Hush, now—you'll have to pull yourself together, you know—you mustn't give way like this."

As one might have talked to a frightened child, Hamilton sat for some time and reasoned with her, and when she had at last recovered her poise, he did not again refer to the subject about which they had differed so sharply and so unreasonably.

Before he left, that night, he went with Faith all over the lower floor to assure her that everything was securely locked; but she insisted on summoning Yetta to her, before he took his departure.

Called out of a stolen nap, apparently, the maid

came slowly down the stairs, shading her unaccustomed eyes from the light. After one swift, scrutinizing glance in which he tried unsuccessfully to catch her eye off guard, Hamilton dismissed the girl from his notice.

With the maid standing by, it was a very conventional good night they said to each other.

"Since you are leaving so soon, I may come back to-morrow evening?—Just for a little while"—for she was demurring.

"For a little while," she finally consented.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next morning, Doctor Hamilton presented himself at Martin Turner's butcher shop, and asked the dark-faced man behind the desk if he could speak to him. It seemed that he could, for Roger Holbrooke rose and followed him to the door.

"Garnett is leaving town hurriedly on pressing business, and has commissioned me to speak to you, Roger," Hamilton opened with.

The other made no reply to this, but stood looking at him steadily, and waiting for him to proceed. Hamilton found his task none too comfortable.

"I hope," he said, a little lamely, perhaps, "that you will not confuse Henry Garnett and myself in this."

"For the reason that I don't wish to, Hamilton, I greatly prefer waiting until I can interview Garnett, himself."

"As his physician," Hamilton hastened to urge, "I can tell you that waiting may defeat any settlement between you. Take that fact under consideration with his offer to you."

"His offer?" the other asked steadily.

"He proposes to pay you," Hamilton replied, "an amount equal to the value of the Empire site at your father's death and simple interest on that sum from that time to the present."

Holbrooke merely continued to look at him.

"Well," Hamilton asked at length, "what about it?"

"Didn't you know my answer to that, before you came here?" the other asked.

"Holbrooke," said the would-be peacemaker, trying hard to stay his own irritation, "Garnett thinks, and with some show of reason, that much of the enhancement in the value of the property is due to other business moves of his which actually eventuated in shifting the centre of business to that point."

"You have come with a simple proposition from Garnett to me—will you take back my answer?—My work is waiting for me, you see."

Hamilton's face flushed darkly. "I came for your answer," he said.

"Write Henry Garnett for me that I will take back what he stole from me— Nothing in substitution— Nothing less than that! If I thought you'd do it, I'd ask you to say to him that I hope he will live long enough for me to interview him on the subject—I'm sorry he got off without my speaking to him, but what I have to say can wait a little longer."

Hamilton caught, with relief, at the fact that Holbrooke supposed Garnett to have left already, and did not correct the impression.

"And is that final?" he asked.

"That's final. Thank you for your—intentions in the matter."

If Holbrooke's manner had been less antagonistic, Hamilton would have found it harder to leave him

without protesting his own deep disapproval of Henry Garnett's position; but, as it was, the man's attitude toward him left it impossible for him to speak more intimately and maintain his self-respect. He accepted Holbrooke's cold thanks with the best grace at his command—for he understood the man's bitterness—and with a final, fruitless admonition to his sometime friend to accept Garnett's terms as the best that he could probably get, took leave of him.

As the dusty screen doors of the butcher shop closed upon Roger Holbrooke's hard, bitter face, a gripping sense of personal failure took possession of Hamilton. Time was when Roger Holbrooke had been very close to him. If he had not been allowed to be swept away by a current counter to that which had borne him, Hamilton, to success and a show of happiness, would not this interview have ended very differently? Just how far was he, Hamilton, responsible for this failure to-day? Just how far-reaching might his failure not prove to be?

When Hamilton's machine slowed up beneath the overhanging balcony of the Garnett residence that afternoon, the chauffeur, by direction, omitted the signal that had become usual in these brief but frequent stops at the old stone steps.

The little lady on the balcony was talking to someone else, and must not be disturbed. Hamilton was delighted. Except for the curly head that he had once dragged in almost by force for the eager, long-ing hands to wander over, and a bunch of high-school

girls, corralled with strategy and delivered bodily to her, Alan knew that he himself was the only one who ever came to her out of this young world toward which her blind eyes were always eagerly turned.

But now, another was talking to her. The fellow stood with his back to Hamilton, half-way up the steps. He was coatless, unshaven, uncouth, and his shirt-sleeves were rolled up to his shoulders.

"I don't wish to be unpleasant about it, but you will really have to see to it that those mimosas are not abused," the little lady was saying kindly, but firmly.

"Yessum—all right," came in roughly gentle tones from the arraigned. Sure! it was Barton, from the stable across the way. So, even unshaven livery-men had their moments of inspiration!

"You see, my husband's mother planted those trees," the old lady conveyed as a valuable and convincing piece of information.

"You don't say so, ma'am!" came in respectful reply.

"Yes, and she was one of the Horrys of South Carolina."

"Well, I declare!" *Were* his big shoulders shaking?

"Huguenot," affirmed the old lady, bent on convincing him of the importance of caring for the mimosas.

"Ma-a-am?"

"*Huguenot!*"

"No-o-'um," doubtfully.

"Besides," she continued, not noticing, "she brought those trees as little sprigs from the old plantation home on the banks of the Ashley, where the stock dates back to Colonial days."

"Well, sirs!"

"So, I naturally cannot see them injured."

"No-o-'um, of course not!"

"Now," and the firm, sweet voice softened, "I don't wish to be selfish about it. I'll be glad for you to break small sprays whenever you want the flowers."

"Yessum. Thank you, ma'am." His big shoulders *were* shaking, unmistakably.

"And I want you to take some to your children from me—my little son used to love the soft pink balls so! You have children, haven't you?"

"No'um, I'm not married." This last seemed offered by way of apology—explanation.

"Oh, what a pity! But you understand about the mimosas now, so that will do, I'll not keep you any longer."

"Yessum, good-by." When Barton, dismissed, turned and ran down the steps, he came near bumping into Hamilton, who was just then alighting from his car.

"Halloo, doctor, excuse me!" exclaimed the fellow, with a lingering laughter in his roguish blue eyes. "Didn't know you were there."

"I've been here some minutes, Barton.—Say, have you definitely decided to run for sheriff? I heard that you were thinking of getting in the race."

"Yes, I'm in."

"You can count on my support."

"Good! I had calculated that Carter, being a club man——"

"No, I'm for you." And they shook hands and parted.

A few moments later the old lady on the balcony was saying to Doctor Hamilton:

"I simply had to send for that man and warn him about my trees, Alan. I hope they will be careful, now."

"Why, yes," replied the young man. "Yes, I'm sure that Barton—sure that Barton will remember what you said to him.—I'm hunting for Mr. Garnett to-day, honey. Have I your permission to look farther?"

"Why, certainly, son, he is in the library. Go right in."

Hamilton patted her corded little hand as he released it. Then he stepped across the threshold into the dead past—for the difference in the local time without and within that portal was a difference of some half a hundred years. Without, it was all bustle and dust and golden sunshine, pervaded by the perfume of heavy flowers; within, was that perennial, shadowy, quiet aloofness that the newly-come imagine they have analyzed when they speak of old mahogany and family portraits.

Groping his way through the twilight of the drawing-room, Hamilton knocked at a closed door, and

was bidden by a voice within to enter. He opened the folding door with some trouble—he always expected it to slide, but it never would—and found himself in the austere presence of Henry Garnett's father.

"Come in, Doctor Hamilton, come in!" There was nothing lacking of hospitality in the greeting of the gray old man who rose to receive him.

In his manner Hamilton accepted that reception at its face value, but he knew perfectly well that he owed whatever of hospitality it extended him to the imperative commands of certain Lares and Penates that sat cooling their heels on that wide, cold hearth. He took the chair his host offered him, with much of inward misgiving, for it was not hard for him to guess that his association with Henry Garnett—now so generally talked about—was scarcely a recommendation for him in the estimation of the father who had cast out his son as unfit.

After a preliminary remark or two between them, Hamilton pulled himself together to say the thing that he had come to say.

"Mr. Garnett," he began, "you knew my father—and my grandfather, didn't you?"

"High-minded gentlemen, both, Doctor Hamilton."

"Then will not your knowledge of them acquit me of any wrong or officious motive in asking to be allowed to speak to you of—Henry?"

The gray old man suddenly grew grayer—older.

"I wanted to tell you," continued Hamilton des-

perately, after he had waited in vain for an answer, "I wanted to tell you that he has developed a serious heart trouble, and that he has not many more months to live."

The old man slowly fitted the tips of his long fingers together. Henry's hands had looked like that—only younger, and nearer death.

No answer.

"And I wanted you to know"—still more desperately—"that Henry seems—changed——"

"You mean that he is repentant?"

"Why—as how manifest—? It's hard to judge."

"Does he turn to the church?"—The very voice was gray—but granite gray.

Hamilton's hope was staggered.

"No-o," he said at length "no—not that."

"*What*, then?"

"Why," said Hamilton, with a plunge now, "I am betraying his confidence—but I *must*! Henry wants to give back the property that he—got unfairly."

"*Now—that he is through with it!*"

"No! I must believe that it is his—atonement."

"And would you call *that* 'atonement,' Doctor Hamilton?"

"Why—yes——"

"You are *young*!"

"I know, Mr. Garnett, that a man cannot undo the evil that he has done to others, but there ought to be a chance for rehabilitation of himself, don't you think?"

"Where are our young men's *standards*!" The old voice broke with passion at last. "Why, sir, in my day a *breath* of dishonor would blast a man for all time—but now! *Now*——!"

The two had risen unconsciously, and stood face to face. Suddenly the young man spoke in tense appeal:

"Your son is dying, Mr. Garnett! Couldn't you go to see him?"

"My son died eighteen years ago, sir!"

"But his mother!" pleaded the younger.

"He died to her, also."

"Do you think that you have the *right*—? Mr. Garnett, *let* me talk to Henry's mother!"

"Doctor Hamilton, whenever you can leave all mention of Henry Garnett's existence out of your conversation, you are cordially welcome to my house."

Hamilton flushed deeply, but he thought of the spirit-starved little face that looked every day over the balcony rail for his coming, and he bowed in silent acceptance of the terms.

"Mr. Garnett," he added, for he was given to fair play, "Henry's mother talks to me often of him, and I have encouraged her because I believed that it would be good for her to do it. But I have not given her any information about him."

"As long as she is not told the blighting truth, Doctor Hamilton—I see no special objection to reminiscences, if your judgment, as a physician, approves."

"I am convinced of the wisdom of it," Hamilton hastened to put in. "And, Mr. Garnett," he delayed, as he stood with his hand on the door, "I want to say to you that Henry did not send me to you."

"You might have spared yourself the pains. I knew that he did not."

"Don't trouble to come out with me," the young man insisted, as he noticed that the other moved with pain.

"Then make yourself at home—and—Doctor Hamilton——"

"Yes, sir?"

"I want you to know that I appreciate the kindly purpose of your action to-day."

"Mr. Garnett—if at any time you should come to see——"

"Doctor Hamilton, if at any time Henry Garnett should come truly to repent of his sins—you may come back to me."

Hamilton bowed and crossed the threshold into the shadowy drawing-room, for he saw that the passion-shaken old man could scarcely stand longer. The shadows gained, he paused a moment, and looked back.—The old man had sunk into his chair, but he sat bolt upright, gray-headed and gray-hearted, by his stone-cold hearth.

"That ends it!" sighed the young man. And he hurried through the shadows to the bustle and the heat and the perfume and the young old lady outside.

"I've got just three minutes to howdy with you,

honey— No, I can't sit down. I am due very shortly at the hospital to saw off a poor devil's legs. He's got to give them up, and he wasn't the one that was speeding, either!"

In spite of Hamilton's protests, the old lady rose from her chair, and followed him to the steps.

"Alan, dear, you know, yesterday, when we were talking of Henry—don't you remember?"

"Why, yes, dear—yes."

"And you told me—you—you *believed* in him—don't you remember?"

"Yes, dear."

"Alan, I want you to do something for me—something else."

"What is it?"

"Find out for me how it was with Henry at the last—nobody will talk to me—they pretend they don't know! But I want to know—I *must* know that when the summons came for him, he answered—like a *man*!"

Hamilton gathered her little hands closer. "That?" he asked eagerly, "that would make up for—all the rest?"

"Why—why—Alan—I'm his *mother*!"

"You—couldn't—?" but he stopped. He had not the language to go further. Instead, he leaned down to her, for she was speaking:

"Not heaven itself can atone for the lost earth touch of him!"

After a silence, he said: "I'll find out for you, honey!"

CHAPTER XIX

It had been a hard day with its heartaches and misgivings, and its certain knowledge that soon, very soon, the something which had quickened everything in this dull old town, this dull old universe, and set it throbbing with a pulse that beat almost too high—so akin to pain was the fierce measure of it—would slip away, leaving only the dear realization of what might have been.

Faith was going away!

It is questioned whether a man ever loses a woman as long as he can see her face, touch her hand, or rest within the sound of her voice. Not till Hamilton came face to face with the thought that there would come a day soon when he would open his eyes upon a world that included her not, did he begin to know that he had lost her. And so it was that the length of that day was measured to him by his impatience to put away that knowledge, if only for one blessed hour—to stand in her living presence once again.

When the hard day came to an end at last, and Hamilton presented himself at her door, he was shown into a little room that he had never been in before. It was well to the rear of the house, and seemed, from its many windows and the character of its furnishings, to be a sort of sun parlor. As the man entered he had the feeling that it was all, in a

sense, remote from him—veiled. The lights were low, the room shadowy. Around three sides, many open windows gave him the feeling of being out-of-doors, in the tree tops.

Faith was waiting for him. She was sitting by an open window with her head resting against the back of her chair. The shaded lights, placed against the side walls, seemed to discover rather the spirit of the woman than her earthly form, so unreal did they render her slim beauty.

When Hamilton approached, she held out her hand to him. He took it and stood for some moments, gazing, as she gazed, out into the leafy darkness.

"Don't let's argue to-night," he said, as at length he drew up a chair. "Don't let's—will you?"

"What then?"

"Let's talk about—anything that will not divide us."

There was a pause, and then she asked: "Don't you think these shaded lights are restful?"

"No! Why should they make you less real, when already you are fading out of my— Don't let's talk about them!"

In a moment or two she made another effort: "Have you had trying cases to-day?" she asked sympathetically.

"Yes—no— What do they signify? Let's get away from that sort of thing to-night."

"Very well," gently. They were silent for a space—the man staring out into the night, the woman

watching his face. Presently she said, glancing out at the darkness that took the tracing of great wax-like leaves, massed together:

"The magnolias are almost too dense here."

No answer.

"I've been trying to reach that blossom—the one yonder that looks like a pale sister of charity—get it for me."

"What do you want to stain your hands with *that* for?"

"Alan—you are—so cross to-night!"

"I am *killed*, Faith!" And he suddenly buried his face on her shoulder.

But the woman slipped away from him and, gaining her feet, began walking up and down the room, while he sat with his face in his hands.

"You'll have to do better than this, Alan! You'll have to do better than this or—*go home!*"

No answer.

"Don't you hear me? Don't you hear me when I speak to you?—If you don't pull yourself together, I'm—I'm going up-stairs.—Oh, you don't try to help *me!*"

Hamilton was on his feet the next instant, with his face flushed, eager, desperate, and his arms outstretched.

"Faith," he began, "*Faith*——"

"Don't say *that* to me!—Don't!—Let me keep the right to love you still!"

The eager arms dropped. The red tide swept back. Another man stood in place of the one who

had appealed, and his head was up, his eyes level. Slowly he turned away; and he stood for a long time, looking out of the window.

Faith waited without speaking. The fight was his to win, and she could not help him.

Finally, after what seemed to her a long, long waiting, he leaned out of the window and broke off the blossom she had coveted. Then he carefully wiped the dark stem with his handkerchief, and brought the flower to her.

"Is this the one you wanted?"

"Yes, this is the one."

Silence.

"Isn't it the purest, loveliest thing in the world?" she asked.

The man looked at her quickly and opened his lips to speak, but he ended by stooping to inhale the perfume of the flower. When he did speak, he said:

"Do you remember Weir Mitchell's poem about the magnolia in the convent garden?—You read it to me."

"Yes," she smiled, "and who does this remind you of?"

"Sister Anastasia."

She held up the passion-pure flower against the shadowy wall, and said, as trying to keep the surer footing they had gained:

"Doesn't it suit this room?—By the way, how do you like this?"

"I like the sitting-room better. Why are we here?"

"I"—and she smiled nervously—"I'm afraid of that room with the long windows and dark veranda. Here, you see," and she motioned to the windows that looked out into tops of small trees, "we are too high up for Shep and his friends to disturb us."

Hamilton looked at her with concern.

"It's much the best thing—for you—that you are going to have a change," he said.

"It *is* much the best thing."

"Where are you going?"

"Straight to Los Angeles."

"You'll leave me your address, of course? And I may write to you?"

"The Dominique Hotel will reach me, till I am settled. I'll send you my address."

"Faith—I've been going about all day in the cold fear that—that you might slip away and never let me know where to find you."

"If I do let you know, it will be because you promise *not* to find me."

"It wouldn't matter, would it, if I kept my head?"

"Yes, you must promise——"

"How can I——"

Suddenly a sharp, listening look came into the man's face. Had something moved against the door? He glanced at Faith. Her eyes were dark with sudden fear. The next instant he had crossed the intervening space silently and swiftly, and thrown wide the door.

Against the dark door facing, like a slim bas-relief, was pressed the lithe form of the yellow girl, Yetta.

There was a dead pause in which Hamilton and the woman who had followed, frightened, his move to the door, stood and surveyed the creature before them.

And the creature stood and surveyed them as unmovedly! Except for a sudden widening of her black, shining eyes, she lay up against the door-frame as still as fate, but she returned look for look with never a fall of her midnight lashes. If Hamilton was white to the lips with fury, and his companion deathly pale with something else, the listening face never once changed hue. The girl merely stood and looked from one to the other!—But slowly the insolence of that burning look kindled the whole creature—a sneer quivered about the thin, wide nostrils—then a smile—a tigerish smile—gradually curled her dark lips.

Hamilton turned to his companion.

“Dismiss that creature, Faith!”

Faith stepped quickly before him. The startled pallor of her face had given way to the scarlet of indignation. She was the embodiment of fury as she faced the insolent girl.

“Go to your room!” she commanded.

“You mean ‘leave the house,’ surely?” Hamilton interposed.

“No.”

“Why, Faith, you certainly—” he was beginning, when she interrupted quickly:

“Not to-night—not now! Go, when I speak to you, Yetta!”

The man had all that he could do to stand inactive, as the slim tiger creature rose with insolent slowness out of the bas-relief, and, with a mocking laugh over her shoulder at them, went deliberately up the back-stairs.

He was mopping great drops of perspiration from his forehead, now. "Thank God," he brought out, as soon as he could speak.

"For *what?*" Faith had sunk into a chair.

"That I kept from knocking her down!"

"To think that Yetta would——"

"Faith, it was she at the window the other night."

"*Alan!*"

"You are going to dismiss her, of course?"

"I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"She is the subject of my one attempt to be useful. Her mother was my black Mammy, and was the only mother I had for years. When she died, I promised her I would befriend her child. I—I have made a mistake with Yetta, I see that now. In my effort to do my best for her, I had her educated and trained like a white girl, but of course I kept her in her place as a servant in my house. The result is, I have raised her so far above her own people that she will not associate with them—that she despises them, and hates the whites with a fierce jealousy. She turned on me once and told me that I had hung her between two worlds and robbed her of her chance to live, and that she would 'get even' with me yet."

"Well, you ought to have fired her right then."

"No—no, I ought not. That's just one mood of her. There are times when she loves me desperately—when she would go to her death for me without question."

"And times when she could— Didn't you see her face to-night?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen that look of her before. By to-morrow, she will be as humble and penitent as a child."

Hamilton stood for some moments without answering; then he took a seat near her, and looked at her earnestly. "But, Faith," he insisted, "that creature isn't—*safe*."

"Yetta?—oh, Yetta's good to me."

Instantly the phrase conjured up that memorable scene at the hospital when the yellow girl had stood, like a tiger guarding its young, between this woman and the world—guarding, guarding something that the world must not know about her. Hamilton looked at the woman as she lay back in her big chair, despairing. The shaded lights, placed low on the side walls, tended indeed to make unreal her slender, softly draped form—to add a more elusive mystery to her deep, passionate eyes. All thought of the tigerish yellow girl became lost in the question: Who is this woman here?

All at once, he had the queer feeling that he had not even begun to know her. In his effort to put away the disloyal impression, he brought his thoughts

back to that other, and said, without intending to, exactly what he felt:

"Faith, I don't want to leave you here with her."

The woman raised up. Her eyes had a trick of looking very dark in half lights.

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly, but softly.

He retreated at once. "She is such a tempestuous—devil— She's going to be a trial to your nerves. There's a very good negro hotel on Briscoe Street. I'd send her there to-night. To-morrow, you can make provision for her future—but you can't keep her here—surely you see that!"

"Alan, I've tried seven long years to save her from— Why, I *won't* send her out among these negroes here! I have taught her and trained her and——"

"Rendered more effective the demon in her."

"But she has the intelligence of the higher race——"

"And the temperament—the *unmorality* of the lower," he put in.

"I—didn't dream she'd *do* such a thing!" she said slowly.

"Well, you caught her in the act."

"Yes—but—Alan, I'll *not* be the one to give her a shove down-hill!"

"Well, what are you going to do with her?"

"What I have done all along."

And though he remonstrated at length, Faith remained steadfast in her determination.

Then, after finding that he could not influence her, Hamilton talked of other things in order to distract her thoughts from the sinister happening.

In a little while, however, he gave up trying to talk. The realization of the tragedy that had come to the two of them swallowed up every other feeling, and the man sat before her with a dumb, agonized question in his hungry eyes.

Faith had turned her shadowy eyes to the night again, nor attempted to answer.

There was silence—silence, till one lone bird called through the darkness, and the night stood still to hear! Out there in one of those swaying tree tops, a mocking-bird had waked to the feeling that the world was dark, and one must sing!—sing!

“Sing?”—but of what? Ah, poet, poet! where else thy theme but in the voiceless hearts around!

“Why doesn’t he *hush!*” exclaimed the man.

“Doesn’t he know that it’s—*unbearable?*” the woman protested, shrinking.

But the wild little poet took no thought of the human hidden, repressed. He was singing as they sing who are unafraid of expression; and he poured out to the listening night all the fierce, sweet things of nature in lyric ecstasy—till the man started up with a smothered exclamation, and shook one of the branches violently.

The song and the singer were gone!

Silence again! And again a chance to take refuge in the human hidden—unexpressed! The man snapped off a leafy branch or two for daring to come

too near. The woman lay back in her chair with a catching sigh. How to fight out of this? How? Oh, for something *safe* to turn to!

"Alan," she asked, after a long pause, "how is it with Henry Garnett now?"

He started. "It is our last hour together," he said.

"It's different to-night, Alan. *I'm* different. We will not lose patience with each other about him now."

"But why should he enter here?"

The woman shivered. "Get my scarf for me—over there—" she said.

Hamilton draped the shining, astonishingly heavy thing about her shoulders, and sat down again by her side.

"You told me once," she said softly, "that a man is neither whole nor strong without sympathy—I have not helped you."

"You have done everything for me!"

"And *nothing*.—I know it now—now that the opportunity has slipped out of my hands. But I *couldn't*, Alan! And you'll never understand!"

"I was to blame," he said; "I insisted on dragging him in between us."

"Do you remember once telling me that instinct brought you to me?"

"Did I?"

"Alan, why—why were you always so anxious to make me see——?"

"Instinct again, I suppose—the world-old instinct of the man to seek to embody the woman of his dreams in the woman that he loves. I thought I had to make you sympathize. But it's no matter now, girl—you are you—that's enough!"

"Oh, have I failed you—like *that*?"

"You—are not the woman of my dreams, Faith, but I'd rather have *you*!—Don't cry!"

"I'm *not* crying!" And her hands dropped on the arms of her chair, where they closed tightly. "I only wish I could."

"Let's not talk about that now!"

"But that is how I have failed you. To-night, I want you to talk to me."

"You won't understand."

"Won't you let me try?"

"What is it that you want to know?"

"Everything."

"About——"

"What has divided us."

The man suddenly looked closer, as trying to fathom her deep eyes in the half light. "Faith," he said, "a little difference of opinion is not 'division.' Let's drop him——"

"But I want you to talk about him to-night, Alan."

Hamilton looked at her again, questioningly, but receiving no explanation of her mood from the dark mystery of her eyes, yielded as one might yield to an unreasoning child.

"Why," he began, in answer to her, "I still think

I am right about Garnett, Faith; and yet—I suppose you were right, too, from your view-point. That's the trouble with life—if right *were* right, and wrong, *wrong*, few of us would fail to choose wisely."

There was a long pause, and then——

"How is he, now?" she asked.

"Dying the faster, from the failure of his poor efforts to retrieve. But why——?"

"Tell me about him, Alan. He is your problem now— May I not know?—May I not *try* to understand?"

"Are you doing this to keep me from— I'm going to leave you the right to love me still, Faith."

"I am too far away from you, dear. I want to come closer—tell me!"

Then, in that quiet night hour, and amid shadows that were hardly kept at bay by the low lights about them, Hamilton told her about his knowledge of Henry Garnett from the hour in which the young Greek god had suddenly descended from Olympus to avenge an insult offered to a little boy, to this day just dead, when a father had refused to own his dying son, and an old mother had challenged heaven itself to make up for the lost earth touch of him.

"And that is all," he finished simply, "except that to-night I sit here unconsciously pleading with you to sympathize—and I don't for the life of me know why."

The woman's face was turned to the leafy darkness outside again. After a while, she asked, in a shaking voice:

"Why don't you tell his mother, anyhow?"

"—She might not be able to bear the shock. It's a responsibility I couldn't take."

Another pause, and then——

"This 'Lucy Holbrooke'—you said she was so talented— Couldn't she take up her art now, if— if this man were to give back to her what he took away?"

"Faith, can you imagine what it would mean to be robbed of *youth*?"

"Dear God!" and her hand went up to her eyes.

"Besides," he continued hopelessly, "Lucy's health and strength and *fight* have gone, too, over Sullivan's endless stitching." He paused for a moment, and watched the lines of her half-averted face. "Then, too," he resumed, "it is a question as to whether that property will ever be restored."

The woman looked at him quickly.

"Why," she said, "I thought he wanted to give it back!"

"So he does. But Roger Holbrooke is so bitter against him, it looks now as if he were going to spoil everything. He has demanded, as I told you, the property at its enhanced value, and Garnett will never yield that. Lucy will support whatever her brother does. But that isn't the worst of it. In spite of all I can do, there is going to be an hour of reckoning between Roger and Garnett, and I'm afraid of the issue for both."

"And the trouble about this girl who was left to his guardianship is, that you can't find her?"

"The trouble about her, Faith, is—that we *can*!"

The woman caught her breath.

"And Henry Garnett is dying, Faith, with disappointment thus closing in on him from every side."

"I—I was wrong in not wanting you to help him."

"You were wrong in not wanting me to try, Faith—but *I* can't help him. I see that now."

"*Who then?*" Was it a sharp question, or had the woman suddenly caught her breath again?

"The woman he loves."

"But she *couldn't*——"

"Yes, she could, Faith—and she *only*, could!" Again was he fighting instinctively to save in her the woman of his dreams.

"But how do you *know*?"

"I know, because in my hour of despair, your sympathy saved me. If the woman who has the best of Henry Garnett in her keeping were with him now, and he could rest his crushed and broken self against her heart, the cold, tight something within that is killing him, body and spirit, would give way. If he had known a love, a tenderness like yours, Faith, he would never have hardened so!"

She did not answer, and, after a while, he spoke again:

"The peculiar poignancy of Henry Garnett's tragedy is that this recreant woman actually has it within her power to give him another chance."

"How?" It was almost a gasp this time.

"Why, he would live months and months longer,

if all were well with him. And who knows what such a reprieve might mean to him, with a restored faith in one soul to plead for a restoration of a larger—a saving faith?"

Not a leaf moved, not a floating strand of her hair stirred. All was fatefully still when she answered him:

"If—you should see her—you'd tell her to go back to him?"

"With all the power of pleading I could summon."

"Oh, Alan, would she—*would* she listen to you?"

"A woman who *could* desert a man without giving him a chance?—I don't know, Faith, but I'd try."

"The pity of it—" she was beginning, but he interrupted:

"The pity of it is, Faith, that the heart of a strong man should be bound up in anything so despicably weak—so disloyal—so unlike anything that a woman ought to be!"

"*Alan!*" Her white arms went up as if to shield her.

"Faith—what——?"

"I am Henry Garnett's wife!"

Not a sound or move broke the stillness, till the man cried in sharp agony:

"*No!*"

"Yes!" the woman confessed again.

"You, Faith, *you!*" and the next moment, he was at her feet with his arms about her knees and his face pressed upon them. "It's too cruel! too—too—revolting— It cannot, *shall* not be!"



"Yes—keep back!"

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"Let me go, Alan! Let me go! I am his— You have said it!"

"I won't *have* it!" He was clinging to her as she started to her feet to escape him. "You *Henry Garnett's*?"

"Yes—keep back!"

When Hamilton staggered to his feet with his hands to his temples, there was almost madness in the wild stare with which he regarded her.

"You, Faith—you?"

"I—I am the recreant wife who might have saved him! I am the woman who might even now give him another chance—add months and months to his—right of possession!"

"*Faith!*"

"The question is yours to decide: Shall I go back to Henry Garnett?"

"*Almighty God, no!*"

It was a wild ride that, and it lasted till the pale dawn.

Late dancers returning from the country club started at sight of the stark, white face that was thrust forward over the driving-wheel of the madly speeding car as it passed. Early milkmen reined aside their frightened mules as the thundering, panting thing bore down upon them, and exclaimed unconsciously as a blanched face cleft the dark for a moment, and was gone like a spirit swept to its fate.

Stragglers, creatures of the night-time, withdrew into the deeper shadows of the wooded roadside,

lest a desperate curve too much, fling the mad thing upon them.

Another lone speeder—glanced and understood.

It was a wild ride that, but it ended with the pale dawn at what he called his home. Hamilton took a long, deep draught from a flask in his closet, and threw himself across his bed.

At eleven o'clock, a servant knocked at his door, and knocked and knocked again. At half-past, a violent ringing startled the sleeper from his stupor. —This *was* his room, and that *was* his telephone ringing, ringing! He struggled up in spite of his reeling senses, and seized the receiver.

"Why—why—yes, Upson—good God, I forgot!" he exclaimed, as he momentarily covered the mouth-piece with his hand—and then again: "Yes—but I can't—I'm down and out!"

And after a listening pause:

"But I can't, I tell you, I haven't got the nerve—No, I'm not sick, don't come here! Take the operation for me—I'll hold the phone—Yes?—*Bailey?* Well, damn him, let him *have* Bailey!" And he slammed down the receiver, and dropped back upon his bed.

But he did not sleep again. He lay back trying to think—to remember—to feel, again. No use. Then, now, everything reeled and throbbed together in instant pain!

A knock sounded upon the door, but Hamilton listened in silence. Then a white something was slipped through the crack beneath. He stared at

it for some moments before he bestirred himself to see what it meant. He had to steady himself when he first stood up, but in a moment more, he had the note in his hands and had torn it open. It was from *her*. He sank into a chair before he could attempt to read it.

Am leaving on the six-o'clock train this morning, it ran, because that is the *only* way. Don't follow me—remember that you have promised me the right to always love you. I will write to you and you may answer, but we must not see each other.

I have just a few minutes to catch the train. Good-by. I love you.

Hamilton dropped his reeling head upon his arms.

CHAPTER XX

FOR reasons best known to himself, Hamilton slept that afternoon and night through.—Slept, but with the ever-conscious feeling that at least Faith was safe from—Henry Garnett! Hamilton slept. When a man has faced the unthinkable for a hundred miles and more of black darkness, relief of some sort must be forthcoming.

But an awakening must come to every man. With the gray dawning, Hamilton opened his eyes to the truth that he had not faced disaster like a man. Tom Thornton would have doped, too; but Upson wouldn't—and Tommy held that calf when the test came, even if he did have to be boosted up to it!

Then he remembered, with one of those curious, detached flashes of recollection, how Maggie had once told him there had been a time when she prayed fiercely for a girl, and that that little soft Tommy was what she got. Almighty God, had *his* mother prayed for a girl?

Hamilton covered his face with his hands. If only he had kept his nerve for that operation yesterday! Had that poor devil been sacrificed for his failure? Or had Bailey's fool luck stood him in stead yet once again?

At what mere straws do the drowning grasp! Hamilton recalled now with a desperate reach after hope how Tom Thornton had laughingly characterized Doctor Bailey's methods.

"Yes," Tom had said to a group of sympathizers, "Alan, here, and Upson break their necks every year or so, getting back to Germany for more elaborate methods of railroading people to the New Jerusalem; but Bailey, always true to his native soil, happens around at the hospital, takes out his jack-knife, whets it on his shoe, carves out or trims off anything he may happen to need for his show-case, and has the patient sitting up and taking nourishment the next morning."

Yes, Bailey *was* lucky; and then, Upson had been there, assisting. God forbid——!

But Faith was safe from *Henry Garnett*!—and what was any man's life compared to that?—The Maker of Men—did He hear that?—But—but—the Maker of Men had made *him*, too, and all this fierce revolting——

Now, see here, if a man was to get back his nerve, he must not skirt too close to bottomless declivities! He must think about—something else.

There was the mortgage on Maggie's home, for instance. He was doubly glad, now, that he had bought it. It never would have done to place dear Maggie under even unknown obligations to Henry Garnett.

And so, the Ware girl had gone to the devil!—But Starnes had his orders not to tell Garnett, as

long as they could not locate her—not to tell Garnett because the shock might—but if he did, *Faith would be—!* God, the declivity again! And flinging over on his pillow, he prayed fiercely: “Make me, keep me, a man!”

Then he struggled out of bed and turned on the cold water in his bath, full stream. That whole morning was spent in an effort to get back what of his physical self he had sacrificed, but with only indifferent success. The afternoon, however, found him exercising reasonable command of his nerves in the few professional calls he considered it imperative to make.

Doctor Bailey’s operation of the noon before had been “successful,” he heard at the hospital with devout thanks; and what was better still, the patient had survived it! Hamilton had a struggle with himself. He must stop and speak to the man whom he had failed. But what to say to him? What to say?

But the man was sleeping.

At his office, to which he repaired that evening for an hour of study, Hamilton found a letter waiting for him. From *her*, he guessed, as he tore it open. He was surprised, for she had sent her note to his house number. The nervous little missive ran:

ON THE TRAIN.

I am running away, deserting—the coward in me at my throat again! What is to become of me? Will the time come when I want to run away from this self of me, and cannot escape?

I am going to begin this morning and write for you all that I know and feel and am; it will take a long time, but there is a long ride ahead of me. I shall spend several days in St. Louis at the —— Hotel. Wire me there, for I am afraid.

Yetta has left me, and I am troubled about her. She grew so insolent this morning that I lost my temper with her completely, and discharged her. That roused all the demon in her. She said that I had spoiled her life for her by unfitting her for the only world in which she could take a part, and that she had nothing, nothing to thank me for but a bitterness that would have its inning yet. I was positively afraid of her for a minute or two. She got off the train a few stations back—somewhere in northern Mississippi.

I am by myself, with this burden on me—this burden of knowing that I have failed you in the unforgivable way—failed to be the woman that you dreamed, and made you willing to be satisfied with less.

Be sure to wire me.

FAITHLESS.

Hamilton turned to his desk and wrote out a long night letter with nervous haste.

She was right, *right*; and the one thing for her to do now was to forget what he had urged in his obsession. If she had not realized the woman that he had dreamed, it was the dream woman who had been at fault. A woman was *sacred*! And he wrote on and on of “desecration” and of “truth to one’s self.”

As for that other, full enough had been sacrificed to him already. After all, it was God’s or fate’s or nature’s way that a man suffer for his sins; and what right had anyone to interfere, since God, or whatever ruled above, knew best? Why seek to shield a

man from the consequences of his sins, since by those very consequences, if by anything at all, the man was ultimately to be chastened, saved? Why interfere at all when sin itself might be but a keen-edged tool for the use of the Sculptor of character? Alan paused. He read over the last clause, and then carefully erased it. That sort of thing was not good for women.

She was to write to him and tell him all that she knew or felt, as she had promised. And she was not to trouble one moment about that darky—she *could not* play providence to the creature, so she must stand aside, and let the consequences of the girl's own misdoings take her in hand and discipline her, as was intended.

Above all things, she was not to be afraid!

Hamilton summoned a messenger and entrusted to him the astonishingly long night letter. Then he shoved his stationery back, and lowered his desk top, with the feeling that he had cut the Gordian knot with the sword of Alexander.

His glowing Dorothy Perkins—his spirit of light, of fire, of radiant loveliness—to be sacrificed to——!

And the sinister genius of that rush through an hundred miles and more of black darkness rose up before him, and fixed him again with those big, dark glasses—dark that the world might not see the eyes of a lost soul! Dead cold and evil to the core! She had said it, and she had been— The sheer declivity again! Refuge!

But then the man's father ought to know him.

"And would you call that 'atonement'?—You are *young*," the old man had said to him when, in his obsession, he had fancied that he could save a soul!

And Roger Holbrooke—Roger had had sense enough from the very first, not to be blinded. "Blinded?" Yes, hadn't he, Hamilton, been blinded? Had there been one iota of fairness in Garnett's offer to Holbrooke? Was that "atonement" even on its lowest plane?

And the Empire!—the source, the refuge of nearly all the evil in that town, with its glittering, enticing bar, its gambling rooms above, and its damnable third floor!—If the man had had a single upright impulse, why had he refused to close that place? If immortality *was* a condition to be achieved, what was there for this man who, as Faith herself had said, did not deserve to live?

And this was the man for whose sake he, Hamilton, had set half the people in town whispering that he was dissipating! The man who—who— The fellow who had flung himself upon a powerful adversary because a little boy's face had been slapped! Hamilton started to his feet and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He walked the floor.

But why must one be forever paying? And was a man justified in sacrificing himself? Ought not he, Hamilton, rather, to face about now and retrieve his loss?—Of course, he would do all that a physician could do for Henry Garnett.

Then somebody said, "A gentleman's word is

always his 'word of honor'"—had *he* said it to little freckle-faced Billy, or had Billy said it to him?

He came to a dead halt. "Yes," he said in answer, "yes."

It was settled now. He would do all that he had promised Henry Garnett—fight for every hour of life that could be added to the man by fighting, and continue to make Garnett's problems his own for settling—except—except— But he had not promised there; and besides, a higher law than a gentleman's word decreed that women be protected.

Then he flung open the top of his desk again, and sitting down to it, wrote and wrote to Faith, saying over what he had said in the night message, and much more besides.

When the letter was finished and stowed away in his pocket for posting, Hamilton closed his office, and went out into the street with the determination of going straight to Maggie with a full confession, and a plea for help. Maggie was so sane, so true, so wholesome! She could tell him how to help Faith.

He would go to Maggie, and he would not leave on his slate a record by which they could locate him. It was imperative that he have a long talk with his friend, undisturbed.

If the devil does not take a personal hand in our affairs, there are times when appearances are very much against him.

For the lack of a stamp to post his letter, Hamil-

ton dropped in at the nearest drug store, and shortly found himself surrounded, detained.

"Sam Bailey has just delivered himself of a piece of news, Hamilton, but maybe you won't——"

"Brace up, Alan!" laughed another.

"It's no fair to tell him here!" put in Mr. Bailey.

"Sam has just told us that he and Miss Howard are going to be married next month," Tom Thornton explained.

"I beat you, Hamilton!"—and there was a ring of real triumph in Mr. Bailey's fat voice—"captured the prize!"

The crowd laughed.

"Yes, Sam—you beat me!"—and Hamilton deserved a prize, himself, for the modicum of seeming sincerity he managed to inject into his voice.

"Oh, Chivalry, Chivalry, how many damned unpleasant things have to be done in thy name!" Tom Thornton was whispering in his ear.

Alan remembered the conventions in time to shake hands with Bailey and congratulate him. Then he and Tom Thornton moved to the door.

"I never would have believed it," Hamilton was saying to Tom, "but, after all, it has its redeeming points. The Howards are poor, and—well, Phyllis is not fitted to battle with the world."

"And gets along with the flesh and the devil surprisingly well!"

"Yes," said Hamilton, giving him a straight look, "and that, after I was fool enough to tell her the truth about him!"

"I question, Hamilton, whether women want to be shielded now."

Hamilton lighted his cigar. "Let me know what you decide about it," he said, as he passed out.

"Just my luck!" he was saying to himself, as he made for the letter-box at the corner. "All my life I've meant to get even with Sam Bailey, and now I never shall—never, because of Phyllis!—But I'd better not meet him in hell!"

In a few steps, however, he was called into the drug store in which he made his headquarters, to answer an imperative summons to the phone.

Mr. Henry Garnett was very ill in his chambers in the Empire building, would Doctor Hamilton come at once? the message said.

"*Would Doctor Hamilton come?*" If the feeling that suddenly surged up in the listener's breast had forced itself to expression, it would have been something like the cry: "Let this cup pass!" But he said, after but one moment's hesitation: "Yes, Felix, I'll be there in five minutes." And his tone did not betray the revolt within him to a single one of the idle group that stood around.

In five minutes' time he was beside the sick man, giving directions to the valet and a couple of white men who were trying to do something for the patient. Several other men, among them Detective Starnes, Hamilton noticed, were gathered about the lounge on which the sick man lay. But not one of that number congregated there had the acumen to interpret the something in the physician's keen dark

eyes that looked so like concern, yet sprang from a suddenly awakened repugnance within him to the thing that lay before him.

"More air, please," said the physician, looking up momentarily from his patient. As the group gave back, he leaned low over the suffering man, for he saw that the twitching lips were struggling to speak, though the eyes were closed.

"Patch—me up—Alan—*I can't—face Jim!*"

And Hamilton worked as if his own life, and not this man's, were in the balance—worked as if the one thing desired were the continuance of this sinister shadow across the path of his own happiness.

A half-hour later the patient rested quiet, but still Doctor Hamilton lingered, watching him closely, and giving directions to the nurse whom he had summoned from Saint Joseph's. The habitués of the Empire had withdrawn—all, that is, except the detective, Starnes. Hamilton noticed that he hung about uneasily, and he experienced little trouble in guessing why.

And now Starnes was beckoning to him. Hamilton followed to the door, and the two stepped out into the hall. It was Doctor Hamilton who spoke first.

"You told him, I see," he said grimly.

"He got onto me so close I had to."—Starnes was turning his derby around and around in his hands uneasily.—"How could I tell he'd lurch like that?—He ain't never been the sort to care."

"Well, you see what you did."

"I had to, doctor—it's *business*!"

"It seems to me that as long as you can't locate that girl definitely, you might have left the truth about her untold—I told you you'd get your money just the same, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I *have* located her—and I didn't have no right not to tell him, when he put it up to me."

"Why didn't you tell me first, as you and I agreed?"

"He cornered me, I tell you—and it's *his* business."

"Where is the girl?" Hamilton demanded.

Starnes tapped him on the chest with his derby, and pointed below with the same convenient tool.

"Right down there on the third floor of the Empire. She's one of that bunch that he's been bribin' the police to let alone so long—been here all this time—under an alias—and him a-lookin' for her all over the Gulf States!"

"Starnes, has Henry Garnett ever——?"

"God knows—ask Him!"

"Has Garnett seen her since he found out?"

"Yeh—him and me together. I wanted you bad when I saw the look of him, and tried to put up some sort of dope to get you along; but he said he was sorry he had ever let you dabble in the case at all—said you never had been that sort!"

"Did he try to get her to give up that life?"

"Offered her a fortune if she'd spend the next

six years in a convent. You wouldn't have believed it was him, if you'd heard him pleadin'!"

"What did she say?"

"Laughed at him, of course."

"And Garnett——"

"Walked out at last, like his old self, with me follerin'. He come straight up here, and into that room there, and—dropped."

A couple of men came down the hall at this juncture, and Starnes joined them at the elevator. Hamilton turned back and re-entered Garnett's sleeping room. But he stopped midway between the door and the bed on which the long, gaunt figure had been placed. He could not bring himself to look in the man's defenceless, unmasked face.

'Patch me up, Alan, *I—can't—face Jim!*' Almighty!—whoever was almighty to hear!—thanks, that on that other side there waited no outraged spirit—but—but one day, here or in the forever, the dark shades would be dropped from between *him* and the man who lay yonder! The declivity again! Refuge!

Hamilton held out to give an added direction or two to the nurse, and withdrew without again approaching the sick man's side.

It was out of the question to go to Maggie now, for the obsession was threatening to return. He would wait—wait till he could see clearly again.

CHAPTER XXI

HAMILTON had failed Henry Garnett in spirit; but because of that very failure, the physician redoubled his efforts for the man on the plane on which it was still possible for him to be loyal. During Garnett's several days of illness, Hamilton left nothing undone which could have been done for his patient, and he called at his apartments in the Empire much more frequently than the exigencies of the case demanded.

Their interviews, however, were always in the presence of the attending nurse, and with Henry Garnett's shading glasses between. For this, the younger man was keenly thankful.

To stand alone in that presence, to face, perhaps, another confidence from the dying, to hear again that deep voice saying, "I trust you, Hamilton"—this were unspeakable!

And to escape the very thought of it, the physician redoubled his attentions to the physical needs of the patient. When these efforts proved futile to lay the ghost that had risen in his path, Hamilton essayed to exorcise the dread thing by recounting to himself the numbers of times he had sought to minister to the dead cold spirit of the man, and at what expense to himself!

And he assured himself, over and over, that one

man could not possibly help another escape the consequences of his sins, and that it was worse than folly for a man to hazard his reputation for one who had no claim on him whatever, and no right to a claim.

Strange that he could ever have been so blinded!

But the high calling to which he had pledged himself demanded that he save to even this man here every moment of life which it was within the power of his skill to preserve. Hamilton worked to restore the man as they work who do not dare to fail.

Then, early one morning, a telephone message came to Doctor Hamilton, saying that Mr. Garnett was entirely well again, and that the physician need not call that day, as his sometime patient would be out about matters of business. Mr. Garnett's very great thanks were to be conveyed. It was the voice of Henry Garnett's servant that gave the message. Hamilton hung up the receiver, and stared for some moments at the calendar opposite.

At breakfast that morning, some bromide got off a joke about "dead men's shoes."

Hamilton rose from the breakfast table with the determination of going straight to Maggie with his confidence, but a letter, delivered to him at the door as he was starting, sent him to his room for an opportunity to read unobserved.

HOTEL ———, ST. LOUIS.

I promised to tell you, but now I find it hard. After all, only the essential facts are of consequence, so let me tell you those, and put the rest of the story as far from me as I can.

My father, Charles Oliver Reid, was a South Carolinian. As far as I remember, I knew no other relative beside himself, my mother having died when I was born. When I was fifteen, Father took me and my old nurse, and her child, Yetta, to San ———, Mexico, to live.

We met Henry Garnett in San ———, and he and my father became friends. The Mexicans were prejudiced and suspicious, so Father and Henry were thrown closer and closer together in defending their rights.

Then Father died suddenly. We believed that he was murdered; and for a time, I thought I was going the same way. But Henry came to my protection—God help me, but I'm trying to forget how splendidly he did it! I was overcome with gratitude. He asked me to marry him, and I did. At first, I thought I loved him. He was big and brave, and there was a romantic mystery about him that fired my young imagination. I realize now that, for all his seeming coldness, he loved me fiercely—I realize, because I have met Love, and know him for what he is.

I was only sixteen, Alan, so how could I know then? Love is a plaything at sixteen!

Henry was never unkind to me. He drank, but I never saw him under the influence of liquor. He was never unfaithful to me—I believe that firmly—and I am trying to do him justice.

He humored me to everything in the world I wanted, yet as one would humor a child, but he never took me into his confidence—not one time. As time went on, I began to be possessed with a fear of the mystery which surrounded him—you see, the romance soon dropped away. He had asked me in marrying him if I would take him for what he was; and he held me to that whenever I approached him on the subject of his former life.

Well—it is so hard to tell—so hard to really understand in looking back! I am sure, now, though, that I never loved him, and that my restlessness about the mystery which surrounded him was turned swiftly to dislike, to suspicion, to

hatred, because of the very fact that I did not love him, and still had to be wife to him.

Then came a time when all other feelings for him were swallowed up in a growing, menacing fear of what he might be. I—why I suppose I was not well, for one thing—but I got to the place where I had to escape him for a time—it was that, or kill myself. Nine years ago to-day, two years after my marriage to him, I persuaded Henry to let me take Yetta—her mother was dead then—and go to Santa Fé. It wasn't Santa Fé that I wanted, but momentary escape from him. In Santa Fé, I met a lady who told me all about Henry's past without once suspecting what I was to him. She was a cousin of the Holbrookes, and told me their story one day, when the conversation turned on the willing of property. We were in her room at the time, and she showed me a picture of Henry she had cut from an Alabama newspaper several years before. Under the picture, was an account of a suit by the Holbrookes for the recovery of their property, and enough else to show me that the black sheep she had been describing and my husband were one and the same man.

"The woman who had it in her to desert" came uppermost.

My father had put a large sum of money to my personal account in a bank in Santa Fé. I drew it all out at once and, taking Yetta, started on my long flight from Henry Garnett, leaving behind a letter of explanation which was to be forwarded to him after I was well away.

I could fill volumes with my experiences in hiding from his detectives, with my growing fear and horror of him, but I am trying to keep sane.

Well, one time, believing that the very last place in which I would be apt to run across him, was the home town that he had disgraced, I passed through on my way to take ship for Havana. That is, I expected to pass through, stopping over one night at the Frankfort hotel.

From the palm parlor of the hotel I saw Henry Garnett enter the lobby. I fainted, they say—but you know the rest.

Then you came, Alan; and all that was woman in me, all that was young in me, went out to you. In the beginning, I stayed there, because I simply could not go. The loneliness behind those old magnolias, the hiding away from my kind, the danger of discovery, were nothing compared to the thought of leaving the town where you passed to and fro.

I tried to keep you at a distance—do me the justice always to remember that I did.

And believe me in this: When I found out that you were involving yourself with Henry Garnett, I protested for your sake. You thought I was soulless, because I could not follow you in your heroic efforts for him—but you see I knew him, and I knew you— And yet—maybe— Oh, I *am* going crazy after all!—But I was afraid, Alan, afraid for his influence over you. That's the reason I kept on staying there. I thought I could save you from him—and all the time, I was scared to death lest he find me out. You called it "superstition" once—maybe it was just that, but I don't know! I guess my nerves *are* to blame for something. If somebody would only show me a way out!

And, now, what can I say in justification of this woman who had it in her to desert one man, and to fail another by falling so far short of the woman of his dreams?— Just this: That she was a woman robbed of girlhood—Oh, Alan, do you remember asking me once if I could imagine what it would mean to be robbed of youth?—Why did you always, always put your hand on the wounds that were sorest?

But I am trying to speak for the defence. This woman was worse than robbed, for all that was buoyant, all that was girlish, all that was passionate in her was pressed back upon her heart, and left to flame up again—at the touch of a man who had not the right to kindle it.

I have such worlds and worlds to say to you, but a terrible weariness has come upon me. I'll just have to stop now. Another time I'll try to word to you and to myself the something in me that is threatening to rise and overwhelm me. It is raining and I am tired and sleepy and beaten.

I had hoped to get a wire from you to-night, but none has come yet. I shall stay here some days, so that I can hear from you. It makes it seem so long since we parted—not to have heard.

Good-night,

FAITHLESS.

P.S.—Don't think that you made the decision for me. It is I who have failed—I only. I should have come away even if you had begged me to go all the way to duty. Don't reproach yourself for my faithlessness. You have always been brave and loyal and true. In that one mad moment, I tempted you too far, so the blame is all my own. You did *not* decide for me, dear—so put the burden of that thought off your heart—somehow, I know that it is there!

I don't mean that I am sorry I came—I mean—I don't know *what* I mean—I am so dead tired. If I only had a sister to-night! I need a woman friend so desperately!

A sheer declivity, whichever way he turned! What was this something which threatened just as things were settled—settled in the only way conceivable? Had what he urged upon her in his obsession struck deep, after all?—But she was gone—thank God for that! And she had his night letter by this time—possibly the other. They would reassure her—make her see things as they were.

But if they shouldn't?—What man on earth could read the heart of a woman? “If only I had a sister to-night,” he read again, and the cry touched a peculiarly tender chord within him. Poor little woman! alone in a world made by the loves and hates of men!

It was imperative now that he talk to Maggie, for only a woman could interpret the moods of a

woman. He would begin this day with a full and clean confidence to that only sister he had ever known.

As his car swept down the long avenue toward the business section, Hamilton told himself several times that Maggie would show him how to make Faith rest content in the righteousness of his decision. He knew that Maggie would sympathize with him—first, because of the justice of his position, but more especially and more humanly, because of her unbiased opinion of Henry Garnett. Time was when Hamilton would have despised himself for taking comfort in Maggie's fierce dislike to the man, but that time was not now. He longed to have her tell him that he and Faith had made the only decision possible; and he was taking grim comfort in the thought of the childishly terrific anathemas she would pronounce on the situation, when he was startled to attention by a succession of staccato notes from his own auto horn, and glanced up to see a little spirit hand waving from a balcony that had withdrawn in high dignity from the irreverent street.

Something very like to physical pain pierced the breast of the young man as his car glanced past.

Main Street reached, the car stopped in front of a shop door, and the chauffeur jumped out.

"What sort, this mornin', doctor?"

They were in front of the florist's, but already an eager clerk was beside the auto, with a box of white roses left open for inspection.

Hamilton remembered now that it was Wednesday, and that he had made a practice of carrying flowers every Wednesday morning to the little lady who waited on the high and mighty balcony.

"I knew you would want these," the clerk was saying, "so we removed the thorns to have them ready for you."

"Why, yes, yes," Doctor Hamilton answered, "they are gorgeous, Fulton— No," as the clerk laid the box in the car, "I'll get you to send them this morning. And say—send some every now and then without waiting for further direction, will you?" And the something that felt like pain pierced the young man's breast again.

The drug store visited, Hamilton directed the chauffeur to Mrs. Thornton's; but as the car headed up the avenue by which they had descended, he gave orders for a detour by another street. On that other street there waited no spirit hand to beckon him away from the course that he had elected to take.

"Maggie's house," ever since it had been "Maggie's," had been distinguished, or, rather, characterized, by the presence of a baby; and it had got to the pass that you couldn't come up on the place from any angle without starting a little boy.

This morning, it was Bombastes Furioso II who was most in evidence. He had the front veranda all to himself, and was staggering down its length on a pair of most uncertain legs, when Hamilton came up the steps and hailed him.

The baby hove to, and turned to regard the intruder with a countenance so comically tragic that the intruder laughed in spite of that ache in his breast.

"Old man," he said, putting a hand on the child's big head, "your thirteen months seem to weigh heavily upon you!"

"Don't you believe it!" and Maggie came out, banging the screen door behind her. "He's as placid as the 'rising moon that hid the stars'—it's just that I accidentally got a good look at Tom when I ought to have been careful."

Hamilton was surprised to hear himself laugh, as his hand met hers in a warm clasp. Somehow, Maggie was as good as a tonic, any day in the year.

"See here," he said, after they had exchanged greetings, "that child is bow-legged, Maggie!"

"Oh, well," she replied, "most of us are—in one way or another. It's an age when people have to stand on their feet too soon!"

Hamilton told her that he wanted to have a long talk with her, so they repaired to seats on the side veranda, leaving the tragic-looking baby to settle his own problems—it was Maggie's idea of how to make big men out of little boys.

In response to a sympathetic inquiry, Hamilton went straight to his story, while Maggie listened with every faculty awake. She interrupted him only once during the long recital, one of Maggie's many comforting traits being the ability to listen.

But to his surprise, Hamilton found his task of

telling the whole truth to Maggie difficult. He had expected the story to flow easily on the current of her sympathy, but was unaccountably disappointed.

Because it was difficult, however, he took great pains to make all the circumstances plain to her, and to put before her clearly his own position. When he had finished, she let a moment of dead silence come between, and then she asked, with a troubled face:

"Alan, dear, did you come here to find out what I really think, or to get me to approve what you had already determined?"

Hamilton started. "Why—I want you to express *yourself*, Maggie!"

"You turned your back on your better self, when you sent that woman away from her duty."

"'Duty'?"

"Yes, 'duty.'"

"But, Maggie, that man——"

"That man is her husband—by her own testimony he was never unkind to her, never unfaithful."

"But she had ceased to love him——"

"Alan, I'd be afraid to tell you how many married women fall out of love with their husbands—it's one of those things that are not good for men to know!— No, I'm not speaking lightly—I'm telling you the stark-naked truth. Lots and lots of wives fall out of love; but a good many of them fall back in again, when sorrows and struggles prove their husbands to them."

"But if the test years prove the man unwor-

thy—?” Hamilton stopped, as the lines of Maggie’s sweet mouth suddenly became drawn.

“If the woman have courage, Alan, and have the woman instinct planted deep enough within her, she will mother the man even in his unworthiness, and love him for the reason that she has to fight both his weakness and her strength for the very life of the love she brings him. Then when the babies come,” the little mother continued, “life and love run so deep that the loss of the ephemeral something which we call ‘romance’ ceases to pain.”

Hamilton looked away from her wistful eyes. He was thinking of a certain mortgage which lay in his office desk.

“But,” he insisted, “I am not talking about *weak* men. Suppose the man is given over to positive evil, as Henry Garnett is?”

“Time was when you wouldn’t let me say that, Alan.”

“I have better judgment now.”

“You had a better heart then.”

“But you, Maggie, you always hated him!”

“And loved you for struggling with him. Alan, dear, my bark is a good deal worse than my bite.”

“But you wouldn’t say that a woman ought to continue to live with Henry Garnett!”

“I’d say that she ought to have gone back to him and tried to help him do better. If every woman who is disappointed in the first few years of marriage were to run away——”

“Oh, please,” the young man protested, irritably,

"don't let's get into generalities, you can prove anything in the large!"

"Well," said Maggie, with a little patient sigh, "the case in hand, then?"

"You know how absolutely unworthy Henry Garnett is of any woman's—loyalty!"

Maggie looked at him a moment. A strained smile flickered on her lips, but her clear eyes grew suddenly misty.

"You are very much of a man, Alan, dear." And somehow he knew that she didn't intend it as any compliment.

"Just what do you mean?" he demanded.

"I think you know what I mean, and I don't think you want me to put it into words."

"But I do want you to."

"I mean, Alan—that it was your higher, nobler self who acted in what you just now called your 'obsession.'"

"You didn't mean that at all. Maggie, you are hedging now!"

"Well," she began, again, "I mean, then, that it was the natural-born *man* in you that suddenly faced you about when you were fronting the East.—Alan Hamilton, the question of the woman between you and Henry Garnett has sent you back to the jungle!"

Hamilton came to his feet abruptly, with his face a bronze red. His companion rose, too, quickly. She tried to put her hand on his arm, but he drew away.

"Alan," she protested, with troubled eyes, "you insisted!"

"You—you are narrow and conventional, Maggie. I was foolish to expect you to understand."

Maggie's spirit flashed up valiantly. "I am what you and I were bred and born and reared, Alan Hamilton—what you are still, down in the buried depths of you."

"Well, we won't discuss that. I have taken enough of your time." He was on the top step now.

"Are you going away mad?" she asked uneasily.

"Not at all, I am merely disappointed."

"I'm sorry, Alan. But I would have been less than a friend, if I had told you anything except the truth."

"Why, what you have said can't affect me.—Good-by."

"Good-by," she said, "come back—when you have thought it over."

It is the unexpected things in life that are the unreal ones. Our sensibilities, jarred by the shock of their sudden appearance, simply refuse to accept them wholly, unqualifiedly.

As Hamilton set foot on the step of his car, he glanced across the street, and stopped, transfixed. It simply could not be true—and therefore was not true!

All the same, down the opposite sidewalk, strolled the familiar figure of a light-yellow negress.

The man watched her for one static moment, and then called, sharply:

"Yetta!"

The girl stopped and looked across at him. Even at that distance the insolence of the look she gave him carried. Then she turned and walked away without vouchsafing the slightest answer to his call. Hamilton surprised an approving smile on the face of the chauffeur, who had been witness to the little drama.

"The Walton building," he ordered curtly, banging the door of his car behind him.

Arrived at the Walton building, Hamilton repaired at once to the office of a firm of well-known detectives.

It was the work of a few minutes to furnish Starnes with a full description of a certain octoroon girl, and to instruct him to watch her movements.

That accomplished, Hamilton devoted the rest of the morning to professional calls.

CHAPTER XXII

AT Saint Joseph's that afternoon, Hamilton received some gratuitous advice, or rather, a gratuitous suggestion of advice, from the man of all others whom he most respected. He had withdrawn with Doctor Upson into the consulting room to talk over a case, when the latter said, as if incidentally, but with his keen, analyzing glance upon the younger man's face:

"You are not treating yourself well lately, Hamilton. You'd better take care."

It was not much, and yet it was volumes, coming from the man it did. It involved—Hamilton believed it—much more than friendly comment on his mere state of health.

When the interview was over with, Hamilton was sorry that he had met the remark with a conclusive, if polite, reply, thereby blocking further advance by his friend.

Of course Upson had meant the same thing that the others were whispering. Yes, he had sacrificed too much!

In his ward rounds a little later, Hamilton came upon the nurse who had lately been in attendance on Henry Garnett at his apartments. And he stopped the young woman, and asked why it was that he found her back here before he had con-

sented to her dismissal. He did not see fit to mention the polite, but conclusive phone message by which the patient had dismissed him, Doctor Hamilton, from further attendance, that very morning.

Something unexpected was developing. He must get to the bottom of it!

How long had that girl, Yetta, been back?

"Mr. Garnett has no idea of the menacing seriousness of his own condition," Doctor Hamilton was saying to the arraigned nurse. "Why didn't you phone me when he told you to leave?"

"Why, doctor, I thought you knew—thought you had consented," the girl declared. "I packed his medicines for him, and explained them thoroughly to his hired man. I did all I could, and told the negro what to do if Mr. Garnett should get sick on the train."

Hamilton was looking at his watch. He did not wish the girl to see, by any telltale expression of his eyes, that the bottom was dropping out of his world.

"That trip to—San Antonio—is sheer madness!" he said, recalling now Garnett's interrupted plan to make a trip to Texas, but fearful lest the direction of the man's journey had been suddenly changed.

"Of course it is! And that's just what I told that negro when he showed me their tickets."

"He has bought the tickets, then?" Hamilton was breathing more freely. If Garnett insisted on travelling in this heat against his physician's advice, was not the responsibility his own?

"Yes, the man showed the tickets to me before I left this morning," the nurse was saying.

"By New Orleans?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bad," but his face did not confirm the statement. "When does Mr. Garnett expect to leave?"

"On this afternoon's train—five-forty, I believe."

"Five-forty!" *Five-forty!* Hamilton was staring at his watch again. It took some seconds for him to read the face of it. Five, and six minutes after, at last the familiar face conveyed to his stunned senses!

"That's all, thank you," he said to the nurse.

One of the things that Hamilton remembered a long time was the sound of that nurse's steps retreating down the corridor; another was a certain little three-cornered chip of tin which, now that part of the putty had dropped away, held a pane of glass in the door by which he stood.

Henry Garnett was going away! Had that Yetta told him? And was he going to dog that poor girl's flying footsteps—to persecute her who was already so unnerved, so weak?—But the tickets were for San Antonio, via New Orleans!

In his excitement, Hamilton began to speculate wildly: The tickets were for San Antonio—yet—if Henry Garnett had found out the truth, he was quite capable of buying those tickets for the very purpose of having them shown the nurse, knowing full well that he, Hamilton, was at the hospital every day, and that he would be almost sure to hold this very interview with the returned nurse.

Hamilton stepped into a telephone-booth, and called for a number.

Mr. Starnes was out.

Where could he be found?

Another number, and yet another was tried, before the detective was got on the phone.

Yes, Starnes had located the negress a half-hour after receiving Doctor Hamilton's instructions. She had been down to the Union station, had spent a half-hour in the kitchen of the Frankfort hotel, and the rest of the time that day with a negro family at Number Five, Bascomb Street.

Nowhere else?

Nowhere else.

Not anywhere near the Empire?

No, not in sight of the Empire.

Hamilton hung up the receiver—yes—but the girl had had time to interview Henry Garnett before Starnes had been put on the trail!

He looked at his watch again; it was now twenty minutes after the hour. Ten minutes' time would put him at the Union station.

If Garnett were headed for St. Louis, he would wire Faith. Not for anything in the universe would he let Henry Garnett go to her now!—now while that 'something in her threatened to rise and overwhelm!' Who knew the heart of a woman? Had he taught her all too well in those days when the thought of Garnett's tragedy had so possessed him?

Hamilton was shortly searching through the passenger station for a man with a corpse face. But he

did not need Starnes; when the dead walk among the living, it is easy enough to single them out. There was the man now in front of a ticket window! Hamilton approached from behind. Mr. Garnett was discussing a slight hitch in drawing-room reservations to New Orleans.

He had not heard, then! Faith was *safe*! In less than ten minutes, now, Henry Garnett would be speeding beyond the chance of Yetta's disclosing to him the whereabouts of her mistress. The fates were not absolutely relentless, after all.

Henry Garnett was going all the way to San Antonio! Henry Garnett was going—all the way to—death!

Maker of Men! Was this thing *murder*—this feeling here?

The matter of drawing-room reservations adjusted, Henry Garnett turned from the little arched aperture, and faced Hamilton.

A looker-on, seeing that meeting, might have guessed wildly as to which of the two harbored the more of guilt within him. The younger man turned white to the lips and drew back, if almost imperceptibly; the other flushed eagerly, and held out his hand. Fortunately, one doesn't see changes of color through smoked glasses, and when one confidently expects a hand to be respondingly friendly, the very expectation supplies much.

Hamilton forced himself to look Garnett in the face. The man was intensely excited, for all his na-

tive power of repression; his usually colorless face had a new tinge to-day, his cold voice, a vibrant, living quality. The younger man turned away.

Garnett believed he was going to *her*—it was that which had worked the miracle!

"My train is thirty minutes late, Hamilton," the man with the shaded eyes was saying, at his elbow. "Could you sit here with me a part of the time? I want to talk to you."

"Why, yes, Garnett—all of it. I'm in no hurry. Not here," he added, "let's go outside there." *Thirty minutes!*—Hamilton turned sick at the prospect—thirty minutes in which to be torn between two impossible courses!

They made their way out to the long asphalted promenade which divided the waiting-rooms from the track enclosure, and moved down near the baggage rooms to escape the crowd. Trains were puffing in and puffing out, the notes of their clanging bells being multiplied and remultiplied in the blackened vault overhead, till there seemed to Hamilton's taut nerves to be a thousand bells, ringing the advent of moments that were not to be borne, or the passing forever of those that must not escape.

When the two were seated together, where fresh air and the coolness of perpetual shade contrasted sharply with the stuffy, smelly heat of the waiting-room, Henry Garnett opened the conversation, with again that new note in his voice.

"You have been kind to me, Hamilton, singularly kind—and I have just found out at what ex-

pense to yourself. I want to say to you that—I am sorry I involved you in criticism. I should not have accepted your help if I had guessed what it would mean to you.”

Again the ringing of a thousand bells!

“It is a small thing, Garnett, a despicably small thing!” And it was now—for what was this bubble men call “reputation” beside this gigantic, this tragic bigness here?

“No, Alan, a man must needs be weighed in the balance by the standard unit of his class.”

“Who the devil repeated the gossip to you?”

“Starnes. I had begun to fear, and I put him to find out.”

“Dismiss it from your mind. It is nothing.”

“I have always felt that you were capable of the heroic, Alan.”

“—In spots—Henry—but *God!* the cowardice in between!”

The dark glasses were quickly focussed on the young man’s partially averted face. There was a pause, and then the other said, almost gently:

“The best of us are heroic only in moods.” Then, as the younger man still stared down the long vista of trunks and trucks and laughing negroes, he resumed: “I am afraid my message this morning sounded ungracious. Starnes had just told me the gossip, and I thought that, as people did not know from appearances the difference between a friendly and a professional visit, I’d stop the occasion of criticism short-off by refusing to accept fur-

ther sacrifice from you. I didn't let Felix tell you I was going away, because I knew that you would do just this—stand by me to the last—Hamilton!"

"It's nothing," said Alan, shrinking; "I've strained my eyes a little lately."

"Wouldn't you better get out of this smoke?"

"No, no. You are determined—to try this trip, anyway?"

"Oh, yes. And I want you to know, Hamilton, that when I am where I cannot be made the centre of a sensation, the Empire business will be closed. Warren has his directions."

"Good—that's good!" Doctor Hamilton passed his fingers over his eyes again.

"And Warren has his directions to let it be known, without seeming to try to, that the change is made—at your urgent suggestion. People will understand then."

"*Henry!*"

"The Empire, as it stands now, will be transferred to the Holbrookes, with an acknowledgment to them, and—to you."

But Hamilton neither spoke nor moved.

"I meant to write you this," the other continued, "and spare you the unpleasantness——"

There was silence again; then a long, deep whistle, and then the slow rolling-in of the belated train for New Orleans, to the ringing of a thousand bells.

"Get in line there with the suitcases, Felix," Mr. Garnett's voice was directing. "The train will stop

only five minutes. I'll follow at the end of the crowd."

Hamilton sprang to his feet. "Garnett," he exclaimed, blocking the other man's path, "you can't take that train!"

"Oh, yes, I can."

"But that trip in your condition will mean—*death*! Do you understand me?"

"After a man has suffered *life*, Hamilton, death becomes a slight ordeal."

"But why go, when the chances are that you will never reach San Antonio?"

"Since she is there, Alan, I *cannot* die between. Afterward, it makes no difference."

"Henry—Henry—Faith is *not* in San Antonio!"

"*Faith*'!—What do *you* know about Faith?—My God!—tell me, Hamilton!"

"I know that she is five hundred miles in another direction."

"How do you know it?"

"I have seen her here—talked to her—and—she went away."

"You—you talked to her about *me*?"

"Yes."

"You told her—how it is with me?"

"—Yes."

"And she—went away—without—? Hamilton, where is she?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you."

A tall, slim negro in uniform came down the enclosure, crying the train for the last time, and the

rolling music of his voice echoed and re-echoed through the long car shed, till every niche in that vast arch was shouting the points south, in mockery.

Mr. Garnett motioned his servant out of the pushing line at the entrance gate, and as the man approached, said to him briefly:

"Get a taxi. We are going back home."

The negro preceded them with the suitcases. Hamilton dropped behind Henry Garnett and followed to the sidewalk, not recognizing a single one of the many blurred faces into which he looked as he passed.

Mr. Garnett was in the taxi now, and his man, Felix, was beside the driver. Hamilton stood on the curbstone trying to speak when the man within leaned toward him and said:

"It's all right, Hamilton. I know that if you could not succeed for me, there is no use in my trying. The incident is closed."

And now the taxi was rolling away!

Another letter from Faith awaited Hamilton at his rooms that night. It was short, hurried, tumultuous.

What have I done? it ran. This with my other sin—I have tempted you beyond your strength—I have lured you away from what was noblest in you!

Oh, my dear! That night message and the letter that followed so hard upon it were not of yourself— They were *myself*—just a showing back of the coward, the traitor in me.

I am what I am, and I cannot, *cannot* be the woman of

your ideals; but what I must not endure is that you should turn from her to me. I *want* you to love me, Alan—there's the measure of the woman that I am!—I am not willing to give you back your freedom, your peace. If I did not know that you were longing for me every hour that divides us, the hours would be intolerable. I want you to feel all that I am feeling!—But, I want the nobler you to continue to look clear-eyed at the weakness, the treachery of me.

Alan, dear, there *are* brave women in the world—high-souled, loyal women—women who go all the way to the right. Don't let me take that faith from you. Love me at all costs, and pity me, if you will—but don't justify me to the man I found you.

Oh, Alan, I am willing that we should do this thing—but I am not willing that you should believe it right!

FAITHLESS.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next morning, when Hamilton was miles and miles in the country on a visit to a sick planter, there came a bolt out of a clear sky that shocked the population of that town out of its multitudinous egoisms, and wrote one stark fact across the suddenly pale day:

One of "Maggie's" little boys had been stabbed in the heart!

Where now were the social barriers, the business differences, the race prejudices of yesterday?—Fled before the sublime face of tragedy! That whole, big, human, throbbing town had been stabbed to the heart with Maggie's little boy!

Who said that place was not just the right size, anyway?—He lied in the throat of him! Anybody could have seen that at a glance that day—for rich and poor, powerful and powerless, white and black, dropped the interest that only a moment before had seemed all-important, and hurried to where the bolt had fallen.

In the street in front of the Thornton place, the handsomest autos in town and the shabbiest buggies in it waited, while their owners stood about the terrace and in the halls and reception-rooms in silent, wet-eyed helplessness. Along the low coping which marked the limit of the lawn, the airiest, lightest-

yellow ducky in town forgot her social prejudices and whispered heart to heart, about the inscrutable ways of Providence, with the blackest Guinea nigger there.

Somewhere inside was the dying child, attended by nearly every physician in town, except Alan Hamilton. And somewhere else—as near as the doctors would let her come—was Maggie, dry-eyed—still. Out in the back yard, under the wistaria arbor, Tom Thornton was wrestling with a long-neglected God.

And now another auto was added to the line outside, and Doctor Hamilton jumped out and hurried up the steps.

“Which one?” he asked of the first man reached.

“Tommy.”

“God!—How did it happen?”

“Billy and Giles Holbrooke were fighting. The Holbrooke boy drew a knife, and the little fellow threw himself in front of his brother.”

“Is—Tommy—dead?”

“No. Dying.”

Hamilton passed hurriedly into the hall. The wet-eyed, helpless ones gave back silently. There were several closed doors beyond, but Hamilton knew behind which one to look for Tommy—it was the one against which Maggie lay huddled.

“She won’t come away—won’t let us touch her,” a woman whispered to Doctor Hamilton.

“Phone to Saint Joseph’s and ask Sister Anastasia to come,” he said.

Alan went straight up to Maggie and raised her to her feet with his arms about her like a brother.

"You are coming in here, Maggie," he said to her, and he led her to a room some distance away, directing Phyllis Howard, by a glance, to follow.

"Alan, I want you to do something for Tommy—I want you to do something for Tommy," Maggie was saying, over and over, to him. "They are saying in that room that they can't. Tom and I want you to take him in hand—we want *you* to say."

"You and Tom want me to do what I think ought to be done?"

"Yes, yes. Just as if he were yours. Tom said tell you to *do* something, not just stand around and watch him die!"

"If God will help me, Maggie," he said simply, "I will. But you are going to stay here with Phyllis."

He put his arm about her shoulder again, and then went out, closing the door of the room behind him.

The next minute he was in the room where Tommy lay panting out the little of life which remained to him, while a half-dozen physicians stood around.

There was a distinct stir in the room when Hamilton entered. Doctor Upson and Doctor Bailey stood back to give him place beside the bed. The others shifted positions slightly.

Hamilton felt their eyes focussed on him as he rapidly examined the wounded child—testing the almost imperceptible pulse, listening for heart

sounds that barely carried, running his hands over the already cold extremities. As he leaned low over the child, watching his quick, shallow breathing, he heard Doctor Bailey say, in an undertone to Doctor Upson, that something was "impossible."

"Tommy!" said Hamilton distinctly.

Every sound in the room was hushed, as the little eyelids fluttered up for a moment, and a smile that ended in anguished contortion passed over the baby face.

Hamilton stood up, and immediately became one of a consulting group.

"To operate means simply to shorten life." Doctor Upson spoke as for the group. "The left ventricle has been deeply penetrated."

"What has been done at Frankfort-on-the-Main ought to be possible here," Hamilton urged.

"Possible to Rehn, yes." Hamilton caught the sneering aside which Doctor Bailey meant only for the man who stood next him. He answered the remark as if it had been made openly:

"What Rehn has done at Frankfort, Doctor Bailey, *ought* to be possible to any one of us here, and I am going to try it. The parents have said that they want me to do with the child as with my own. Doctor Upson, I'll get you to assist."

Professional dignity forbade any manifestation of the excitement which, nevertheless, ran like an electric shock through the group, but glance crossed glance with widely varying import.

What had, at that time, been done only once in

the history of the world, and never in America, was to be attempted by this young surgeon here whom report had characterized as on a physical and moral decline.

Glance crossed glance with widely varying import. "Rash," "splendid," "hopeless," "desperate," "*maybe*," they signalled to each other; but all silently agreed that with this dark-faced young surgeon, as with the child who lay between them, it was the chance of a life.

When the instruments and dressings and gowns were brought by the nurse hastily summoned from the hospital, and the child was placed on a table and prepared for the operation, the interest became intense.

To every man in that company but one, the babyish form which lay there stretched under the chloroform was a patient who furnished an interesting clinic, a possible opportunity to see demonstrated what to them was only a questionable theory; but to the man whose hand was either to hasten death or snatch life from the grave, it was "Maggie's little boy."

And now the breast was laid open. As Hamilton's long, deft fingers relieved the distended pericardium of the accumulated blood which was slowly smothering the heart, the physician who was watching the child's pulse looked up with an exclamation: "Stronger!"

Then, while Doctor Upson tilted the little heart up almost out of the cavity, Hamilton deftly cleansed

and sutured the gap left where the deadly knife had been drawn away.

When the operation was finally completed, and Hamilton looked up into the almost unbelieving faces which surrounded him, Doctor Upson said, distinctly and emphatically, as if desirous that none should fail to hear:

"If the child lives, Hamilton, this will mean national reputation for you—and more."

"Nothing the matter with *that* nerve!" came more bluntly from another.

With his hand on Tommy's pulse, Hamilton said to a looker-on:

"Tell the mother and father, please, that they can hope. And all of you who are interested,—watch the case with me."

A short time afterward, a group of physicians, talking together with keen interest, emerged from the sick-room, to be attacked from all sides by anxious questioners; and very shortly thereafter, the rumor ran wild:

"Doctor Hamilton has performed a miracle!"

Alan and Doctor Upson remained with the nurse beside the sick child. In a few minutes the door of the room opened, and Sister Anastasia came in softly.

"I have been with the father and mother," she said. "May I bring them in?"

It was in that hour that the wet eyes were dried, and their owners got busy demonstrating that the

size of that town was exactly the right size, measured by all the units that really count.

Strangers who had never before entered Maggie's doors tiptoed about, and picked up certain boy playthings that lay about the hall and porches. Casual acquaintances went straight away and cooked everything good they could think of and brought it back to the house of disaster. Neighbors scrubbed and dressed Maggie's other little boys, nolens volens, and carried them off in various directions to remain till the crucial days were passed. The dissipated-looking woman who had started the gossip about Alan and the lady of mystery at Maggie's garden-party, made a pot of strong coffee with her own hands and carried cups of it to Doctor Hamilton and Doctor Upson, and to Maggie and Tom. Mrs. Lupton descended into the kitchen in her very best dress, and fixed a bottle of milk for Bombastes Furioso II whom she found staggering around loose in the excitement.

"What a tragic-looking little baby!" she had exclaimed, "he's getting ready to scream himself to death!" And, taking him at his face value, she snatched him up and carried him out under the pecan-trees at the extreme end of the garden, prepared to fight it out with him. But Bombastes had a surprise for her—he curled up in her lap like a rose-petal, and went to sleep in the middle of the lunch she had so kindly prepared for him.

Every service that human hands could perform was rendered Maggie without ostentation, without

questioning hesitation; and Maggie accepted without demur, for she was born to the manner of their generosity.

For three days and nights, Tommy's life hung in the balance; and during that time Alan never left his side, except to snatch a few hours of sleep or to make calls too urgent to be turned over to Doctor Upson.

And all the time, the tide of his reputation swelled. In the first few hours it had broken over the confines of that narrow town; in a few days it had spread far and wide—Associated Press despatches being busy with daily reports from the bedside of the child who had been so miraculously saved.

At midnight, the third day, Hamilton and Maggie were alone beside Tommy. The last vestige of fever had left him, and his sleep had become natural and deep.

"Tom and I will have to give you a third interest in him, Alan," Maggie whispered, with both her hands tight on his arm.

"Honest?"

"Oh, Alan!"

"Then if he is to be part mine, I can give him something, and you and Tom will have no right to refuse me."

"You have given him back life——"

She stopped in questioning surprise, for Hamilton was slipping a formidable-looking paper under Tommy's plump hand. Without asking what it was, she took the paper and opened it.

"Alan, *I can't!*" she exclaimed. Then she suddenly dropped her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"If I have won any right to Tommy, Maggie, you'll let him tear up this mortgage when he wakes. Is he part mine, dear? *Is* he part mine now?"

And at last she said "yes" between hard sobs.

An hour later, Hamilton sat beside a table in the bedroom which Maggie had assigned to him during this period of anxious watching, and examined several papers which he took from his pocket.

A note from Starnes, sent late that afternoon by a private messenger, said that the negress, Yetta, had not yet held any communication with Mr. Garnett—she was reported ill.

Another, in a childish hand that wandered all over the page, commended him for his brilliant work in saving 'that dear little curly-headed boy that everybody was talking about now,' and begged Alan to bring the little fellow to see her when he should be well enough to come. The note further said that she had missed Alan sadly, lately, but that she didn't want to be selfish, and that it was sweet of him to send flowers so very often.

A third was an already opened letter, postmarked "St. Louis." Hamilton's face was drawn with pain as he opened and reread it.

It is early dawn [Faith wrote to him], and I have just waked from a dream which I *had* to escape—you were saying to me again, 'The pity of it is that the heart of a strong man

should be bound up in anything so despicably weak, so disloyal, so unlike anything a woman ought to be!' I waked, and tried to take refuge in your letters—your letters that keep urging what you know this coward woman in me wants to hear. But it is no use, Alan; you *spoke* the truth to me, and you can't unsay it. Now that I know what love is, I am trying to think what it would mean to *me* to have love prove disloyal. . . . I have walked the floor till sun-up, trying to force this coward me to face the thought of your love grown disloyal; but all I could think was to wonder, wonder, what it must be like to be dying alone without a saving hope for the future or memory of the past!

I shall stay here. I haven't the courage to go farther. Write me a letter from the real you, Alan. I won't mind its being cruel— It's those others that I can't stand, dear—I simply *cannot*!

FAITHLESS.

For the third time that day, Hamilton tried to answer that letter, and for the third time, failed.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOOKING back to this time from the vantage-point of the after-years, Hamilton was able to recall that during these days, people looked at him curiously as he passed; that now and again a man would come out of his way to lay an approving hand on his coat-sleeve; that women fluttered around him and spoke their praise of his wonderful achievement, openly and without stint of adjective. But while the little drama of his lionization was being enacted Hamilton played the title rôle perfunctorily, and like a man whose spirit was elsewhere.

"Make me, keep me, a man!"—his fierce prayer, sent out into the universe to find the One whose business it is to answer, but made its circling way back to the spirit within him, and left the burden of the problem on his own soul.

How should he answer Faith? How answer Henry Garnett when the now inevitable hour of accounting between them should be at hand? The spirit within him recoiled before the solution which suddenly rose out of the unsounded depths of his inmost soul and presented itself before him.—Not that way! *Any* way but that!

And the people did not understand. They saw the now famous young surgeon pass among chattering hero-worshippers with a cloud of pain on his

handsome face; they noted that he paled, rather than flushed, when men spoke their confidence in him; they saw him draw back with a sensitive, hurt look in his dark eyes when some clear-faced woman spoke of how close they must be to the Maker of Men—those men whom the Maker entrusts with the power to restore.

It was on the morning of the fourth day after Tommy's accident that the detective dropped in at Hamilton's office "to pass the time of the day," as he said.

"Nothing doing in your case yet, doctor," he reported. "The nigger is still sick, and if she'll just stay sick a little longer there won't be any interview between her and Henry Garnett."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if he ain't done for by this morning's experience, I'm afraid I'm going to lose faith in your diagnosis of heart-disease."

"What 'experience'?" Hamilton's face was keen—
—anxious.

"Why, he had a terrible scene with Roger Holbrooke this morning; and after I got Holbrooke out, Garnett locked the door behind him, and began walking up and down the floor.—He's walking now, and he won't answer when I knock."

"What do you know of the interview?"

"Why, I was there, bless you! I was with Garnett in his sitting-room when Holbrooke descended on him like the wrath to come; and I stayed to see that Holbrooke didn't forget the fellow's physical

condition. Lord, I thought I'd seen men in a rage in my time, but I didn't know anything about rages. If Roger Holbrooke had come hot from hell, he couldn't have been more furiously revengeful."

Something like a groan escaped Hamilton with the question:

"What did Holbrooke say?"

"Say"? You don't think I could remember the ravings of a lunatic, do you? Why, he blamed Garnett for everything that ever happened to him—sounded like he had a pretty good case, too, by gad! But it's damned cowardly, to my thinking, to tell the man the truth when he's down. It's as bad as hitting him, and worse. Fact is, I think Holbrooke would have hit him, if I hadn't reminded him."

Hamilton's interlocked fingers were spotted with the strain that he put upon them. "How did Garnett take it?" he asked.

"Like a stuck wild beast. But he turned as white as a sheet when Holbrooke charged him with having ruined you."

"Starnes!" Hamilton exclaimed; but the other interrupted:

"Oh, I butted in there, you can bet! I told Holbrooke that a man *couldn't* be ruined when it was lies they were telling on him, and I gave 'em both a moving picture of how your stock has been bulled in the last few days. You see, I happen to know that Garnett's been worried lately about getting you criticised. Say—I've about come to the conclusion that I am no good at detecting the insides of people!

I'd have taken my oath on it that Henry Garnett didn't give a damn for anything that walked in shoe-leather, when, lo and behold, he turns out to be nothing short of weak about you! Actually told me that he trusted you!—That from him—think of it!"

Hamilton turned away. When his glance returned to the face of the detective, he asked:

"How did the interview end?"

"Why, you know Holbrooke, don't you? He flamed out again as soon as I stopped to get my breath. Started on Joe Holbrooke and how and why he died. I pretty soon saw that Garnett couldn't stand any more, so I watched my chance, and shoved Holbrooke out into the hall and pulled to the door behind us. Stokes happened along just about that time, and he and I together got Holbrooke quiet enough to talk to. When I made Holbrooke see that he had already said everything there was to say to Garnett, he took himself off without further trouble. It was then that I tried Garnett's door, and heard him walking."

"Starnes."

"All right."

"—You say that darky hasn't talked to Garnett yet?"

"No—and—a—doctor, if you shouldn't for any reason want her to, how about my making her a little present, and seeing her on the train? They don't refuse *me*"—with the glint of steel in his narrow eyes.

Hamilton drew back. "Why, no—*no!*" he said.

"Well, it's *your* funeral," laughed the other, with a shrug.

As Starnes took his leave, the maid laid the noon mail on the physician's desk. Hamilton's eager fingers quickly singled out and opened an envelope directed in a flowing, feminine hand.

"I'll call you," he said, in quick dismissal of the maid, and then he read and reread while his heart stood still to hear:

Alan, do you know what it is to be alone with God? To come just as you are into the presence of the Maker, who meant you to be something very different?—Fly from it, if you can! Take refuge behind whatever fallacies, whatever excuses are at hand, and don't let Him call you out into the open! If, as you say, immortality is to be *achieved*, and if such an accounting is a condition to the achievement—immortality is not worth the price!

I wish I could feel that you are right about it. Just out of my window, there, is a little iron balcony that hangs over a sheer drop of six stories, with the city pavement at the bottom. If you are right—then one could escape immortality—escape the Maker who meant her to be something very different—just by a plunge into the white lights below there. But if you should be wrong, and God should be down there, too, waiting! Is there any refuge for the coward?

I am not losing my mind, Alan, don't be afraid. I'm just obliged to send you a line to-night, and this is all I can think of. I have tried and tried to say something else—but nothing else will come.

FAITHLESS.

Hamilton took the letter and the ones preceding it, and left them with Maggie to read.

"You've *got* to find some way of helping her, Maggie," he said, as he entrusted the letters to her.

That afternoon late, a phone message from Detective Starnes said that 'the girl in question had been admitted to a conference with Mr. G.'

An eternity later, measured by the pounding pulse of the man who still sat at his desk where the confounding news had found him, came another message from the same source, to the effect that the conference referred to some thirty minutes before had been brought to a close.

Almost immediately, the phone bell rang again. Was that Doctor Hamilton? This was Henry Garnett speaking. Might they have an interview that night at Hamilton's office at—say, about nine o'clock?

Hamilton unconsciously put his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone in his struggle for a moment's thought. Then he removed it, and said, a little tersely, perhaps:

"I think I understand, Garnett.—You have just talked to—her maid. I'll come to you at nine o'clock."

"No," came in steady tones over the wires, "if it is the same to you, I prefer your office. You will be on time?"

"I think you can trust me to meet the engagement, Garnett." And he hung up the receiver.

In the generations which had preceded Hamilton, there had been one way of settling a difficulty like

this. His father had believed in it, and his father's father. With the Garnetts also, there had been one way. Then, all suddenly, Hamilton realized that he believed in the one way, too.—“*Believed?*”—Yes, was not belief more surely of the blood than of the brain? Opinions were often but the product of the hour, instinct was born of the centuries. “We young men are the sons of our fathers,” he had sent as a message to Henry Garnett's father! And now he was to meet that father's son at nine o'clock to-night—here—and render such accounting as he might!

What should he say to Henry Garnett? *How* should he say it?

But before the answer came, Hamilton was called to immediate action in another field. An injured man, just brought to Saint Joseph's hospital, needed his surgeon's skill.

No time to think now!—Later, he would decide.

At nine o'clock that night, what had been Henry Garnett came to Hamilton again in his office in the Hawley building.

But Hamilton had not had time to come to any decision, for he reached his office, hot and exhausted from the long, tedious operation, but a few minutes ahead of the appointed hour; and he was called upon to answer the expected knock at the door before he had had time to fling himself down for a few moments' relaxation of his taut nerves.

Hamilton knew what he would be like—the man

whom he had bidden to enter. He saw the tall, stiff figure, the skull-like face, the dark glasses behind which the spirit of the man had wrapped itself away from human reading, before the door opened and admitted the living presence of Henry Garnett. What Hamilton's imagination had failed to conjure up was the gruesome suggestion of the closed door and its dark framing about the figure of the man whom he had bidden to his presence.

With a nervous unsteadiness of movement, Hamilton removed the shade from the electrolier.

"Come in, Garnett," he said. "Will you sit down?"

Mr. Garnett came forward. "I'll—let you say, Hamilton, whether I sit or not."

Hamilton gave a long, straight look into the obscuring glasses; then he said, with his hands resting a little heavily on the back of a small chair: "We'll stand."

A subtle change passed over the other man's visible features—it was as if he had started at the answer. The lines about his hard mouth relaxed a little, however, as he said, with manifest effort:

"I am wondering, Hamilton, if suspicion in matters like this belongs by instinct, or—if—in my own case—it is the consequent and natural punishment for having surrounded myself for so many years with the untrustworthy."

He waited.

Hamilton found his breath coming with difficulty, but he stood up straight, in spite of it, and returned the dark glasses their level gaze.

"If the case had been another man's," the other was saying now, "I should have pictured myself in his stead as dismissing the informant without a hearing, secure in my faith in the integrity of my friend. Eighteen years ago *I* would have done it. To-day, I listened. To-day, I come to you with questions which the man I should have been would have answered for himself."

Hamilton waited.

"Is it true that you have known Faith all these months?"

"—Yes."

"True that at first you forced yourself upon her against her will?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that, for some time, you have been—making love to her?"

"Yes—when I did not know of the tie between you."

"And did you—when you did know—when she left it to you to decide whether or not she should return to me—Hamilton, *did you*—?" Was it anguish that distorted the ghastly face and cut short the question?

"—Yes," said the young man, turning away from what he saw.

"*Why?*"

Now, *was* it because Henry Garnett was unworthy? *Was* it because a higher law than a gentleman's word decreed that women be protected?

"—Because I loved her. Because I couldn't help it!" Hamilton said.

The Garnetts had believed in the one way, too! Would Henry Garnett invoke that one way now? Hamilton looked out over the twinkling city to the dark and darker stretch of cotton lands beyond. The simple truth—was it not the only tribute meet for the injured, the dying? But how was he bearing truth—that dying man back there—during this unbreakable silence?

“Does Faith—love you?” came out of that silence, and after a long, long waiting.

“Yes,” said Hamilton, yet once again. Then, with a start, he turned round full upon his questioner:

“But whatever of blame there is, Garnett, is my own,” he declared. “She could have been led all the way to duty. She repulsed me from the very first. *She* is above reproach!”

Hamilton put out his hand to steady the wavering figure, but the other drew back beyond the reach of his helping. There was a dead pause.—Would the man fall?

But Garnett straightened—recovered!

In those times when it was this other man’s spirit that had come up for judgment, Hamilton had, in mercy, looked away. In this hour, he kept his eyes upon the face of the living dead man before whom he stood accused.

Garnett was standing his full height, now, looking—looking out from the refuge of those obscuring shades full into the face of the man who stood before him.—And, now—he was turning away!—He was

moving with quiet dignity toward the door—was opening it!

And now, its polished panels had closed upon him!

Roger Holbrooke had spoken the truth to him that day, too. But Holbrooke had not pretended to be his friend, and then betrayed him!

Hamilton had stood there—how long, he never could have computed—when it dawned upon him that some small but insistent thing was hammering at his quivering nerves and would not let him be. With an effort, he realized that the phone was ringing.

It was just "Henry's mother," who didn't wish to trouble Alan when he had so much on his mind and heart already, but who only wanted to hear the sound of his voice—to know that all was well with him. Alan had promised that she should be his mother, too,—and mothers were always a little anxious about their sons.—She had not seen Alan in so long. Did he mind her calling him?

CHAPTER XXV

THAT night, Doctor Hamilton, by reason of his recently acquired fame, was called to Mobile to perform a serious operation; and he did not return until late the next day.

On his arrival at home, late in the afternoon, the first call that he found on his slate, at the drug store, was marked "*urgent*," and had the number of Maggie's house appended.

"Tommy!" and his heart stood still. Without waiting to note the other calls, he hurried into his machine, and ordered the chauffeur to make good time.

Maggie met him on the front porch.

"What's the matter with Tommy?" he asked, as he ran up the steps to her.

"Nothing. Tommy's all right—it's—something else, Alan."

"*What?*"

"Faith—Faith has come."

"No, Maggie—*no!*"

"Hush, she's in there now."

"But how did she come——?"

"She got in on this afternoon's train, and in phoning around to find you, called me."

"And you——?"

"Went straight to her, of course. I brought her here with me, and I'm going to keep her."

"What good angel made you do it?"

"*Myself*, I'm it! I couldn't stand those letters, Alan. Then, too, I knew that after the unfavorable comment about her, she'd need a woman friend; and I made up my mind that, being the most respectable woman there is, I was eminently the one to see her through."

His quickly tightened clasp on her fingers hurt her almost to the point of protest.

"But what does it mean, Maggie, for God's sake, what does it *mean*?"

"She's in there—ask her."

Hamilton dropped Maggie's hands, and flung open the screen door. He found Faith in the library.

She was standing beside a table, turning the pages of a magazine restlessly, but she looked up quickly as he entered.

Hamilton paused before what he saw—Faith?—Yes. The same indescribable! But with a something infinitely nobler than passion in her deep eyes, and, caught from somewhere, a glory in her face!

"Alan," she said simply to the man who stood silent before her, "I have come back to him."

To the day of his death, Hamilton remembered the touch of her pitying fingers on his hair, as he sat,

where he had flung himself, with his head and arms on the table, while she stood beside him.

"No, no, Alan"—she was protesting gently now—"what you are saying may be right for you—right for anybody else who believes it—but right for me, is what I see before me."

"Faith," he cried, starting up with ashen face, "you are doing this because you think you have injured me by——"

"No, Alan," and she slipped into a seat by him, and laid her hand on his. "No—there was a time when nothing else mattered to me but you. But I waked up one night to the realization that what you had urged upon me all those days when you did not know, was the right *for me*, and that I was either going to it, or to the pavement below."

"I cannot endure it!"

"It is out of your hands, dear."

"Faith," he pleaded, "Henry Garnett's sins have found him out—every one of them! Leave him to their scourging. That is God's way—if—if God is!"

All suddenly, the light went out of her face. "Alan," she said, "it is not given to coward women to know. They can only grope and fear. But Maggie is brave, and Maggie says that it is not the suffering in consequence of our sins that saves us, but the glimpses of God we get in the hearts of our fellow men when they come to the rescue. We were talking about Henry and what you had been to him, and she said that when God is missing from every-

where else in the universe, you can always find him in the heart of a friend.—*Alan!*”

When Hamilton left the house a half-hour after, he did not go by to look in on Tommy, and he passed Maggie on the porch without seeming to see her.

Then, after a little, Faith came out. It was when her cold hands were in Maggie’s warm, comforting ones, as they stood together in the faintly illumined dark, that she found voice to say:

“Alan is desperate, Maggie, I couldn’t do anything with him.”

“He certainly isn’t going to—” Maggie stopped, aghast at what she had conjured up.

“He and Henry have—already. Yetta—I told you about Yetta—came back here and told Henry about Alan and me. Henry went to Alan, and asked him if—if—it were true—and Alan told him ‘yes’!”

“You—don’t tell me!—But how did it end between them?”

“Alan waited—and—then—Henry went out, and closed the door behind him.”

“With his last human tie broken!—Don’t cry, Faith, I didn’t mean to say that! Don’t cry!”

“Alan—was the only one in the whole world that—he trusted, Maggie!”

“Don’t cry, Faith! You will make up for all the rest.”

There was a brave fight for self-mastery, and then Faith said:

"I wrote a second time to Henry and he hasn't come yet!"

"Maybe something in your note hurt him, and——"

"I said I had sinned against him, and wanted to atone—I never reproached him by a single syllable."

"Then why doesn't he come?"

"I thought, maybe, Maggie, that it was because I was in your house. You know the homes here are shut against him."

"But Tom and I wrote and asked him to come, Faith. I didn't tell you."

"And I told him in my last note that if he would appoint an hour, I would meet him at my own house. But still he hasn't answered!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to him."

"*Not to the Empire building?*"

"Don't you see that I have *got* to go?"

The wife who had always borne her cross with high courage clasped the recreant's cold hands tighter.

"Tom and I will go with you," she said.

"Not to the Empire building!—Maggie, I can't let you."

But Maggie prevailed. Maggie generally prevailed.

Tom Thornton, to whom much had been forgiven, was more than willing to escort the returned wife to her husband, though he protested in secret against Maggie's going into any such sinister surroundings. But the forked lightning of Maggie's tongue pretty

soon illumined the big gray sky of Tom's sensibilities for him.

"Honey," she said to him, "what that girl needs is somebody along that's unimpeachably respectable. I'm that, and you are not. Come on—I can make that Empire building look like the Young Men's Christian Association!"

Ten o'clock that night found Tom Thornton and Maggie occupying a settee in the hall of the top floor of the Empire building, and talking together in low tones.

Tom had so arranged it that their little party had timed their coming to catch the man sought alone in his apartments. Henry Garnett himself had answered Tom's knock, throwing wide the door of his sitting-room in response. Then he had stood, like a man turned to stone, as Faith passed in. Tom and Maggie had turned away; and Garnett's hand had closed the door.

That was nine o'clock. Faith had gone in with the determination of persuading her husband to return with her to the home that was temporarily hers. The Thorntons had waited to accompany them as an added protection to Faith against the vulgar curiosity of the habitués of the Empire building.

And now it was ten o'clock, and Tom and Maggie were whispering together of Tommy and of how Alan had given him back to them, when the elevator glided up, and a man stepped out.

"*Alan Hamilton!*" Maggie bit her lip for letting the exclamation slip out.

"You—*you* here, Maggie?—Tom, this is good of you!"

"What are *you* doing here?" Maggie challenged, looking straight into his eyes.

"I found out that he had not gone to her, and I got to thinking that she might do just this. I telephoned your house, and Tommy's nurse said that she had come down-town. And——"

"Didn't you know that we wouldn't let her come alone?" Tom Thornton asked rather gravely.

"I ought to have known, Tom, but I'm not quite responsible to-night—I didn't think at all—I simply came."

Maggie took another sharp look into his eyes.

"Alan," she said, "we are waiting to go with Faith and her husband to her house. You must leave here, and now."

"I can't, Maggie, till I know."

"You *must!*"

"I *cannot!*"

A door opened, but only partially—then shut again immediately; and Faith came to them down the narrow hall. There was a light in her eyes, a light on her white, sweet face.

"He is not coming," she said; and not one of that bewildered three ventured a question.

"Come with us, Alan," Faith said, as Hamilton was closing the door of the taxi upon them; and he obeyed, still unquestioning.

Tom Thornton gave his own house number, and they sped away. During the short drive, Tom and Maggie ventured quiet remarks, now and again; but Hamilton only sat and stared at the strangely lighted face that looked steadily away from him to the passing scene outside.

Arrived at "home," Tom would have followed Faith and Hamilton into the sitting-room to hear the news, but Maggie seized him, and dragged him away.

Hamilton closed the door of the room they had entered, and turned to Faith.

"What is it?" he exclaimed,—for those wide, starlike eyes, that indescribable light on her pale and perfect face, the quick rise and fall of her breast presaged revelation.

"Alan," she said, "Henry Garnett is a *man*!"

Hamilton put his hand to his collar, for it had suddenly tightened.

"Faith, he——?"

"Would not accept my sacrifice."

"*Thank God!*"

"Oh, Alan"—and a shadow of heartache dimmed the glory on her face—"think of *him*—of his utter desolation to-night!"

Hamilton pressed his long fingers to his eyes, while the lines of his face and throat tightened. "What did he say to you?" he asked, when he spoke again.

"I told him everything about myself, Alan. Just the simple truth— He was so gentle—so infinitely

gentle—with me! He did not reproach me once, nor recall one among all those times in which I failed him. And he took all the blame upon himself.”

“Faith,” and the lines came into the listener’s throat and face again, “Faith, what did he say—about me?”

“That you had told him the truth.”

“Nothing else?”

“—He said—he was sorry for you.”

Hamilton turned away.

“I had told him, dear, how you had believed in him; how much you had sacrificed for him; how you had stood out for him against my conscious, my knowing opposition, and had showed me my duty to him.—I told him, Alan, that—you failed him only when the strain became more than you could bear.”

There was a long silence, and then the young man asked, with his face still averted: “What did he say of *himself*?”

“Why,” she said, as if reflecting, “why—*nothing*.”

Hamilton turned to her with the question still haunting his miserable eyes.

“He didn’t say anything about himself, Alan, that I can remember, except to take my sins upon himself. You know—now that I come to think of it—it was strange he did not. He merely sat there and listened. He asked a few questions, I remember—but he didn’t say anything about himself.”

The young man’s miserable eyes were questioning again.

"—He sent you—a message, Alan," she said, in answer.

"*What?*"

"He said—the last thing he said to me was: 'Tell Alan to take care of you.'" The strain broke, and she was sobbing with her face in her hands.

Hamilton raised his head, and looked beyond her out into the night that covered that other, and there was on his face the look which some men wear when they bare their heads in the presence of the holy.

CHAPTER XXVI

It was not from sleep that Hamilton was called the next morning to the Empire building, for he had not slept. Felix apologized, when he met him at the top landing of the elevator, with his brown face ashen gray.

The policeman on guard at the door of Henry Garnett's apartments greeted Doctor Hamilton, and stepped back to let him and the negro pass in.

"Doctor Crossman is out of town," the officer explained, "and we sent for you to make the examination. Riley, in there, has the certificate blank."

"Where is he?" Doctor Hamilton asked.

"Over there by the window"—for nobody doubted to whom he referred—"we haven't touched him, of course."

Hamilton entered. Another policeman was within. He was playing a game of solitaire on the table near the centre of the room, but he hastily swept the cards aside, and stood up, as the physician entered.

"Over there," this second man said, with a jerk of his finger; but Hamilton had already seen.

Facing the broad front window, and so, with its back to them, sat the familiar figure. The head was resting against the tall back of the chair; the legs were crossed naturally; the hands lay along the chair arms.

"He's been settin' there all night, lookin' out!" the negro whispered hoarsely.

Hamilton approached. The eyes were open—he could see that, obliquely, from the spot on which he now suddenly paused. Unconsciously apologetic, the young man's gaze took refuge elsewhere, resting for a moment on a small table near. On that table lay the dark glasses that had been wont to cover that which he had no right to look upon. Alan stepped to the back of the tall chair, and covered with his handkerchief the dead man's eyes before he looked into that face.

The matter of the examination was brief. Dead of heart trouble! Dead within the hour, after having watched alone all night!

It was Maggie who performed the impossible; and she went to Henry Garnett's mother against the advice, the discouragement, against even the protest of all around her. She had deterred Alan once, she reminded him, and now she must atone.

It was Maggie who later telephoned that the undertaker must render up the mortal of Henry Garnett to the house of his fathers.

It was Maggie who stood on the high balcony to receive what the undertaker brought. And she stayed at her post all during the terrible strain and tug of that lifting. And it was a strain, for there had been a sheer cut here, and that which was lifted up the sharp grade was heavy.

It was Maggie who conveyed to Faith the message

that she might come to the old father and mother as she had begged. And it was she again who guessed so wisely, and sent Faith, when she did come, to the gray-haired, gray-hearted old man, who sat alone in the library.

In the southern section of God's country, the people have a way of coming suddenly close together in sorrow or in disaster—of presenting a solid front, as it were, to the enemy. Footsteps that had passed and repassed, unheeding, under that high and mighty balcony, now came hurrying in—the footsteps of the uncaring no longer! Friends, friends that had been, acquaintances, strangers, gathered in the old home with the look on their faces of being there to defend.

And they who had forgotten Henry Garnett now suddenly remembered him; they who had long made it convenient to glance the other way when they met him, came and looked into his face with their heads uncovered; they who had passed him by, stood long beside his coffin. All except one! Roger Holbrooke, leading a boy who was stamped with Martin Turner's heavy face, crossed over to the far side in passing, nor glanced that way.

But among those who came to comfort was a certain young physician whose haggard face caused low-voiced comment everywhere he passed, and who seemed scarcely physically equal to the restless, restless moving about from which he could not be dissuaded.

To Hamilton, who felt that it was his duty to be

here, it seemed that the day would never end. No merciful summons called him to the long and difficult task, and to consequent forgetfulness of the secret remorse and the secret *relief* that he carried about with him, and that were strangely indistinguishable in their power to pain. The few professional calls that were necessary were soon over. They helped while they lasted, but they did not last. The hour at the office at noon proved a relief to him, but for once it was not unduly prolonged.

Fate had decreed that he was to wander, silent and white, about the old house that a certain towering Presence had that day come to occupy. But there did not seem to be any place for him. In the long, shadowy drawing-room was the Presence, and with it a little mother whose ecstatic joy at being once more able to touch the earthly form of her son, though dead he was, mounted too high to be endured. That was no place for a man who harbored within him a secret feeling of *relief*. Maggie was in there with that heart that was breaking for joy—but Maggie was true—Maggie could bear it.

In the library, Faith and remorse and a gray old man watched the passing of the hours together. That door he must not open.

In the halls, the living-room—even in the dining-room, which had been thrown open for more space, were the people who had come to show that they were at one with their old neighbors as against despair.

Alan passed and repassed among them, seeking

always some refuge from the sound of their awed whisperings—being confronted always with questions which he shrank to answer.

Once, as he stood in the front hall near the portière which divided it from the big, shadowy room in which the Presence was, Hamilton caught sight of Mrs. Lupton, tiptoeing down upon him, with curiosity written all over her painted face. To have her piercing eyes pinion him while she questioned was not to be borne. He parted the portières and passed to where he knew that even her curiosity would not follow.

He was in the Presence.

What is there about the confined dead that transfigures them?

That morning, Doctor Hamilton had examined a body to learn the manner of the going out of its vital spark. In that long, black casket there, now lay a Man—but a man raised immeasurably, withdrawn into mystery, wrapped about with an ineffable unapproachableness.

But what was this that was gradually taking form in spite of the shadows?—The gray old father! He was standing beside his confined son, and was saying something to the little mother who sat with her eager hands upon the dead.

Alan parted the curtains and glanced out. Sam Bailey and Mrs. Lupton were whispering together near. He stepped back into the shadows again.

And now the old mother was speaking! Alan started at the note of *joy* in her tone:

"See him for me, Frederick! You see for me better than anybody else!" she was saying.

But the gray old man stood mute before what lay in the coffin.

"He is even *taller*, isn't he, Frederick?"

"Yes," said the old man, at length, "he seems taller." And he did.

"And he is strong and big and broad-shouldered, *isn't* he, Frederick?"—ecstatically.

"His shoulders are *very* broad."

"And he's *noble* and *brave* and *handsome*!"

"He was never afraid," said the father who had called him into being. And he raised his head as he said it.

"Oh, you see so well for me, Frederick! I knew what he was before you described him, but I wanted to hear you say it all!"

And the gray old man who had never lied before closed his lips on the something which seemed forcing itself to them, and turned, and walked heavily to the far end of the room. As he opened one of the folding doors to pass into the library, Alan caught a momentary glimpse of a slight woman's figure. He saw a slender hand laid upon the old man's shoulder. Then the door closed.

When Alan came forward out of the shadows, the mother's corded little hands were struggling to curl the locks that had long since forgotten her directing touch of love. Hamilton slipped his arms about her and laid his face against her thin, gray hair; and she put up a hand and stroked his cheek lovingly. Then her caressing fingers seemed to discover some-

thing. They passed again over Alan's cheek; they sought and explored again the dead face before them.

"Henry's face is stron—*squarer*—than yours, Alan."

"Henry was a stronger man than I, and a bigger and braver," he said.

"*Was*'? Say *is*, Alan. Henry is immortal."

Hamilton's hands closed tenderly upon her slight arms.

"I promised to tell you," he said—but he had to wait a moment before he could finish: "When the summons came for Henry, he did meet it like a man!"

He left her to Maggie, who came forward out of the shadows somewhere. He passed out into the hall, and to the balcony in front for air.

Here a group of men were gathered, talking together in low tones. Hamilton caught a suggestion of excitement in their repressed voices, and he noticed at once that one and all fixed their attention keenly on him.

There was a moment of dead silence, and then Doctor Upson said to him:

"I am glad, Hamilton—to know."

"Glad to know what?" Hamilton looked at him in mystification.

"The truth, and your part in it."

"You didn't know it had been made public, maybe." And another handed him a copy of the afternoon paper.

Hamilton glanced at the column indicated by the obliging thumb.

"Last Will and Testament of Henry Garnett—Contains Remarkably Interesting Disclosures!"

"Garnett summoned me late last night, and made a good many changes," Pierce Warren explained to him. "And he directed that it be published immediately upon his death."

"May I take the paper with me?—thanks—I have a call to make." Hamilton was conscious that their eyes followed him to his car, and that they were speaking together of him as he went.

"Drive slowly," he said to the chauffeur, after they were out of sight of the group he had left; and then he read the last will and testament of Henry Garnett.

It stated briefly that in consideration of the fact that Doctor Alan Hamilton had first inspired the testator to attempt to right certain wrongs of testator's to his fellow men—that in consideration of the fact that the said Doctor Alan Hamilton, at expense of time and effort to himself, had been for the past five or six months the constant and efficient helper of testator in the delicate and confidential task—that in consideration of the fact that the said Doctor Alan Hamilton had acted as friend and protector of testator's wife, who, under the name of "Mrs. Faith Godwin," had come to reside near her husband,—the said Doctor Alan Hamilton was due this acknowledgment of testator's indebtedness and gratitude.

The reader's vision reeled. He put his hand to his eyes and pressed long and hard. The heroic

dead had suddenly encircled with protecting arm the woman he had loved so tragically well!—had stretched out a restoring hand to his friend from the Silence!

When his vision cleared, Hamilton read on. There were many substantial bequests—for the most part, to children of men who were known to dissipate. The Empire site with all improvements was “returned” to Roger and Lucy Holbrooke; and five thousand dollars was bequeathed to Jim Ware’s daughter.

After these minor bequests, all the property of which testator stood possessed was bequeathed to his beloved wife, Faith Garnett. Doctor Alan Hamilton was named as sole and unbonded executor of the instrument.

But not a word of himself, the silent heroic!

Hamilton sent a marked copy of the paper to be delivered into the hands of “Mrs. Henry Garnett.”

Late that night, Hamilton got the courage to go back, got the courage to pass the few curious whisperers who still lingered about the old hall—the courage to part the curtains, and again stand within the Presence.

No other was there but himself and the undying dead. Hamilton stood for a long time before the man who, not stinting to speak in defence of others, had yet wrapped his own spirit about with unbreakable reserve, and gone out into that greater Silence.

Presently, someone else was standing there—Hamilton looked up. Faith had entered.

They looked into each other's eyes, and Hamilton said:

"His spirit has passed mine by, and gone beyond me, forever!"

"Not if you can say that, Alan!" she replied.

UNIV. OF MICHIGAN

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